

AFC QUARTERLY

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION

ISSUE 14

PLUS

LAOS

Expanded league structure boosting ambitious nation



Suwon Samsung Bluewings

Two-time Asian champions look to build on AFC Champions League return

KIATISUK SENAMUANG

National icon leading Thailand back to the top

ISSUE 14

April 2016



MOHANAD ABDULRAHEEM

Forward leading from the front after Iraq advanced to the Olympic Games and AFC Asian Cup as well as FIFA World Cup qualifiers



KYAH SIMON

Australia striker netted four times as the Matildas qualified for the Olympic Games to continue her impressive goal-scoring record



STEPHAN SCHROCK

International midfielder enjoying life in the Philippines having made loan move to domestic champions Ceres La Salle from Germany

TOYOTA

TOYOTA MOVES YOU

100%
FOOTBALL

TOYOTA



AFC OFFICIAL PARTNER

<http://www.toyota-global.com/>

CONTENTS



22 – MOHANAD ABDULRAHEEM

Striker Mohanad Abdulraheem eyes further success having already netted several crucial goals for Iraq ahead of his 23rd birthday later this year.

24 – ABDULKAREEM HASSAN

Abdulkareem Hassan agonisingly fell short of leading Qatar to the 2016 Olympic Games, but the Al Sadd defender is looking to the future.

30 – SHOYA NAKAJIMA

AFC U23 Championship MVP Shoya Nakajima reflects on a change in fortunes over the last two years for the FC Tokyo midfielder.

36 – STEPHAN SCHROCK

International midfielder Stephan Schrock fulfilled his dream of playing in the Philippines after joining domestic champions Ceres La Salle on loan at the start of the year.

40 – IN FOCUS: LAOS

Laos hope a breakthrough success in this year's AFC Cup is the sign of things to come for the South East Asian nation.

46 – AHMED AL SARORI

Yemen's Ahmed Al Sarori scored a spectacular goal at the AFC U23 Championship having already made a name for himself at international level.

50 – CLUB FOCUS:

SUWON SAMSUNG BLUEWINGS

Two-time Asian champions Suwon Samsung Bluewings are out to replicate the success achieved when current coach Seo Jung-won was playing for the K-League Classic side.

56 – KYAH SIMON

Striker Kyah Simon led from the front as Australia qualified for the 2016 Olympic Games to further enhance her growing reputation.

Regular Sections

12 - In The News

62 - 2018 FIFA World Cup/2019 AFC

Asian Cup Qualifiers

64 AFC U23 Championship

66 AFC Futsal Championship

68 AFC Women's Olympic Football

Tournament Rio 2016

70 - AFC Champions League

72 - AFC Cup

74 - Inside AFC

78 - Great Grounds of Asia

AFC QUARTERLY

Issue No. 14

April-June 2016

Official quarterly publication of the Asian Football Confederation

Published on behalf of the Asian Football Confederation by Lagardère Sports

Asian Football Confederation
AFC House, Jalan 1/155B, Bukit Jalil
5700 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

Tel: +603 8994 3388

Fax: +603 8994 2689

www.the-afc.com

www.facebook.com/theafcdotcom

@theafcdotcom

President & FIFA Vice President:

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa

Vice Presidents:

Mr. Zhang Jilong

Saoud A. Aziz M A Al Mohannadi

Praful Patel

Winston Lee Boon Aun

Ali Kafashian Naeini

FIFA Executive Committee

Members:

HE Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al Ahmad

Al Sabah

HRH Prince Abdullah Ibn Sultan

Ahmad Shah

Kohzo Tashima

AFC Executive Committee

Members:

Makhdoom Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat,

Richard Lai, Moya Dodd, Mahfuza

Akhter Kiron, Susan Shalabi Molano,

Han Un-gyong, HE Mohamed Khalfan

MS Al Romaiti, Chung Mong-gyu,

Ahmed Eid S. Al Harbi, Mariano V.

Araneta Jr., Mohamed Shaweed,

Sardor Rakhmatullaev, Hachem

Sayed Ali Haidar, Viphet Sihachakr, HE

Francisco Kalbuadi Lay, Zohra Mehri

AFC General Secretary:

Dato' Windsor John

Editor:

Andrew Mullen

Deputy Editor:

Daniel Pordes

Designer:

David Chung

Photos:

Lagardère Sports, Agence SHOT,
Adnan Hajj Ali, Getty Images, Power
Sport Images

Any views expressed in AFC Quarterly do not necessarily reflect those of the Asian Football Confederation. The reproduction of photos and articles – even partially – is prohibited unless permission has been sought from the editors and a reference is made to the source.



NIKE.COM



Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President



Dear friends,

Welcome to the latest edition of the AFC Quarterly – the second for what promises to be an exciting year for Asian football.

We ushered in the New Year with a clear and ambitious vision for the future. Our aspiration is to be the world's leading football Confederation, one that will see our beautiful game remain the number one sport in Asia as our players and teams dominate on the world stage.

The global football landscape continues to transform significantly and with the new FIFA Reforms, our football family has formed a powerful consensus which will allow us to forge – with FIFA and the new FIFA President - a new, deeper governance framework.

I am pleased to note that the AFC is playing a leading role in this shift, having already implemented several of the governance reform proposals approved by the FIFA Executive Committee. Together with our new Vision and Mission, we will strive to achieve greater professionalism and integrity for all our Member Associations.

Developing world-class competitions is a critical aspect of the AFC's. The coming months will build on this momentum as the AFC's flagship competitions reach the decisive stages. Asia's top clubs are challenging for supremacy in the group stages of the AFC Champions League and AFC Cup competitions. The exciting journey to the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia and AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 will undoubtedly produce more memorable moments as our teams reach the final stages of the qualifiers.

Across the continent, we continue to witness the AFC competitions grow in stature. The AFC U23 Championship Qatar 2016 was a resounding success, with an almost threefold increase in the average attendance from the previous edition, and social media engagement exceeding all expectations.

The AFC Futsal Championship Uzbekistan 2016 also saw two of our teams – Uzbekistan and Vietnam – qualify for their first-ever FIFA Futsal World Cup, joining champions Iran, third placed Thailand and Australia in Colombia later this year.

I am also proud to note the remarkable accomplishment by Vietnam, who will be appearing in their first-ever FIFA final tournament. I would like to congratulate the teams in all our competitions, both men's and women's, for their fantastic progress.

In every way, the performances of our teams and competitions exemplify our mission to create, inspire and engage with the world's biggest football community and strengthen the foundations for all our Member Associations to provide them with a chance to succeed on the world stage.

In a crucial period for football, we have emerged stronger as one united Asia with one common goal and I would like to thank all our Member Associations for their dedication and commitment to bring our aspirations – both for the new FIFA reforms and the AFC's Vision and Mission – to life: One Asia, One Goal.

Asia's potential is undeniable, our growth has been rapid and our progress holds no boundaries. We must continue working together to seize our opportunities and establish the AFC as the world's leading Confederation.

Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa
AFC President

Gallery





..... Crowd Pleaser

Brazilian striker Adriano scored nine goals in just three games against Thailand's Buriram United, Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima and China's Shandong Luneng as Korea Republic's FC Seoul made a flying start to this year's AFC Champions League campaign.

Gallery





..... For The Cameras

Having already qualified for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Japan produced a thrilling comeback to edge out Korea Republic 3-2 in the final of the AFC U23 Championship at the end of January in Qatar.

Gallery





..... **Champion Spirit**

Iran claimed an 11th AFC Futsal Championship in February after beating hosts Uzbekistan 2-1 in the final in Tashkent as Mohammad Nazemalsharie's side completed a 100% tournament record to land their first continental title since 2010.



Japan, Korea Republic & Iraq To Represent Asia In Rio

AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS JAPAN, RUNNERS-UP KOREA REPUBLIC AND THIRD-PLACE FINISHERS IRAQ WILL REPRESENT ASIA AT THE 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES IN BRAZIL FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF JANUARY'S TOURNAMENT IN QATAR.

Asia will be represented by Japan, Korea Republic and Iraq at the 2016 Olympic Games men's football tournament following the completion of January's AFC U23 Championship, which also acted as the qualifiers for Brazil later this year.

Japan beat Korea Republic 3-2 in a thrilling final at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha to round-off 19 days in Qatar in style.

The pair had already secured qualification for the Olympic Games after beating hosts Qatar and Iraq in their respective semi-finals.

And it was Iraq who were able to re-group following their semi-final disappointment by beating Qatar 2-1 in the third place play-off to claim the final qualification place.

"I would like to offer my heartfelt

congratulations to Japan for their win and their magnificent performances throughout the tournament.

"The Korea Republic team should also be praised for their valiant efforts," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"My congratulations go also to the 'team behind the team', the delegation and the Japan Football Association. In Japan, Korea Republic and Iraq, Asia will have a strong trio going into the Olympics."

Japan reached the semi-finals at the 2012 Olympic Games before losing the bronze medal play-off to Korea Republic.

The success for Korea Republic in London was Asia's first since Japan claimed Asia's first-ever medal in 1968 in Mexico after beating the hosts in the third place play-off.

In 1968, Japan were one of the surprises

of the tournament as Kunishige Kamamoto's seven goals, which included both against Mexico, secured the historic medal and they have now qualified for the last six Olympic Games.

Even before their bronze medal success in London, which was secured having lost 3-0 to Brazil in the semi-finals after drawing with eventual champions Mexico in the group stage, Korea Republic boast an impressive Olympic Games qualifying record and have appeared in the last seven tournaments following earlier appearances in both 1948 and 1964.

Iraq, meanwhile, famously finished fourth at the 2004 Olympics in Greece before losing to Italy in the bronze medal play-off.

The men's football tournament at the 2016 Olympic Games will take place between 4-20 August.



Vision And Mission Strategy Unveiled By AFC

THE AFC UNVEILED ITS NEW VISION AND MISSION STRATEGY IN JANUARY WITH A FOCUS ON SUCCESS OF TEAMS ON THE WORLD STAGE, AS WELL AS FAN ENGAGEMENT.

The AFC signalled its intent to become the world's leading football confederation with the unveiling of its new Vision and Mission on the sidelines of January's AFC U23 Championship in Doha.

The new vision will also see the AFC focus on the success of Asian teams on the world's biggest stages and strengthen the level of fan engagement to ensure football is the number one sport throughout the

continent.

The AFC also launched a new Vision and Mission logo tagline – One Asia, One Goal – signifying the core values of unity, professionalism and leadership.

In line with efforts to fully realise this vision, the AFC has set out its mission, centered around seven key pillars: to provide dedicated services for Member Associations to realise their full potential, to enable the success of Asian teams at the pinnacle of world football, to raise the standard of Asian

competitions, to produce commercially attractive content for stakeholders and increase fan engagement, to implement good governance and professional administrative standards, to ensure the utmost integrity at all levels and to leverage on football as a force for social good.

The AFC Vision and Mission was first initiated following recommendations of the AFC Governance Reform Task Force and concluded after a series of engagements with key partners and stakeholders.

Vision

1. To be the world's leading confederation;
2. Ensuring Asian teams succeed on the world stage, and;
3. Making football the number one sport throughout the continent.

Mission

1. Member Associations Development - Focused and

dedicated services to maximise the potential of MAs

2. Successful Asian Teams - The continuous support to succeed at the pinnacle of world football
3. Top Level Competitions - Necessary platforms that raise the standard of competitions in Asia
4. Optimised Commercial Value - Produce and commercialise attractive products that engage with and excite our stakeholders

5. Good governance - Implementation of initiatives that ensure professionalism

6. Integrity - Ensure that the AFC's competitions, matches and the conduct of its people conform to the highest ethical and sporting standards
7. Football for Social Development - Undertake effective social responsibility campaigns



Executive Committee Pledges Support To Infantino

NEW FIFA PRESIDENT GIANNI INFANTINO RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE AFC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOLLOWING FEBRUARY'S FIFA EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS, WHILE AFC PRESIDENT SHAIKH SALMAN BIN EBRAHIM AL KHALIFA BACKED FIFA REFORMS.

The AFC Executive Committee pledged its support to FIFA and the new FIFA President Gianni Infantino and united behind the AFC leadership of President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa following February's FIFA Extraordinary Congress.

Mr. Infantino won the election in the second round of balloting in Zurich.

"The AFC Executive Committee congratulates you on your success in the FIFA Presidential election, and now that the election is over we all wish to show our unity and support as you work for the benefit of FIFA and the global game," said the AFC Executive Committee in a letter to Mr. Infantino.

"The AFC recognises that these have been

difficult times for FIFA, but now, united as one family, we believe that you can produce a brighter future for the game which is close to so many people's heart on this continent.

"The AFC Executive Committee and AFC Member Associations are committed to the development of football, not only in this region but also worldwide, and have consistently shown their support for the reform of FIFA which we believe is an important starting point in bringing about the needed change in fortunes."

AFC President Shaikh Salman also visited Mr. Infantino on his first day in office in Zurich.

"I have known the new FIFA President for many years and I offered him my support in the years ahead," said Shaikh Salman.

Shaikh Salman also pledged his support to the FIFA President as Mr. Infantino begins

the task of implementing the FIFA Reforms which were passed at the Extraordinary FIFA Congress.

The reforms, which were supported by 179 of the 207 Member Associations, include a distinct division of commercial and political decision-making, greater scrutiny of senior officials, and commitments to promote women in football and human rights.

"These reforms represent just the start of a long journey and are essential for achieving greater professionalism, transparency and integrity for FIFA as well as all our Member Associations," added Shaikh Salman.

"We need FIFA to change if we are going to regain the trust, respect and confidence of those who hold our great game to heart."



Australia & China Secure Olympic Places

.....
 AUSTRALIA AND CHINA BOTH COMPLETED UNBEATEN CAMPAIGNS AT THE AFC WOMEN'S OLYMPIC FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT RIO 2016 QUALIFIERS IN OSAKA AND WILL REPRESENT ASIA IN BRAZIL LATER THIS YEAR.

Australia won the AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016 qualifiers to secure a return to the event for the first time since 2004, and the Matildas will be joined in Brazil by China after the Steel Roses claimed second place in Osaka.

Alen Stajcic's Australia, who finished runners-up at the 2014 AFC Women's Asian Cup to Japan, won their first four games after downing hosts Japan, Vietnam, Korea Republic and crucially DPR Korea to qualify with a game to spare before competing their unbeaten campaign with a final day draw with China.

China also secured their return to the Summer Olympic Games for the first time since hosting the 2008 event with a game to spare

having beaten Vietnam and Japan either side of a draw with DPR Korea before beating Korea Republic on the penultimate Matchday.

"I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to Australia and China for their outstanding performances throughout the tournament," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"Representing Asia is an honour and I am confident that both Australia and China will do Asia proud.

"We have seen some breathtaking goals and captivating matches at the Asian qualifiers of Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016.

"The quality on display exemplifies Asia's position as a global force in the women's game. Indeed, women's football in Asia has a bright future, and we can expect more proud moments for Asian football in Rio, and

beyond."

The success in Osaka earned Australia a first qualification for the Olympic Games since joining the Asian Football Confederation having made their maiden appearance as hosts of the 2000 edition in Sydney.

China, in comparison, won the silver medal at the inaugural women's football tournament which was added to the official programme at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Group stage eliminations at the 2000 and 2004 editions were followed by a return to form with a quarter-final finish at the 2008 Olympic Games, although China failed to qualify for London 2012.

The women's football tournament at the 2016 Olympic Games will take place between 3-19 August.

RENAISSANCE MAN

AS A PLAYER, THAILAND'S KIATISUK SENAMUANG SCALED THE HEIGHTS AT REGIONAL LEVEL WHILE SIGNING PROFESSIONALLY FOR CLUBS THROUGHOUT SOUTH EAST ASIA AS WELL AS SPENDING A SHORT SPELL IN ENGLAND. NOW HIS NATIONAL TEAM'S COACH, HE'S PUTTING THAT EXPERIENCE TO GOOD USE AFTER LEADING HIS COUNTRY BACK TO THE SUMMIT OF ASEAN FOOTBALL AND ON THE VERGE OF THE UPPER ECHELON OF THE ASIAN GAME ONCE AGAIN.

By: Michael Church **Photos:** Lagardère Sports







Standing pitchside, dressed in a dark blue tracksuit, Kiatisuk Senamuang has aged little since the days he was taking instructions rather than bellowing out the orders.

So trim is the 42-year-old, it takes little imagination to see him spinning through the air in a celebratory somersault, as he did so often while leading Thailand to one success after another as the unquestioned South East Asian player of his generation.

Clad in what was to become his famous number 13 shirt and having just turned 23, he sprang spectacularly into the consciousness of the regional game when, against Malaysia, he scored the only goal of the inaugural Tiger Cup final in Singapore in 1996 to spark off wild celebrations in Bangkok and beyond.

Kiatisuk sprinted along the sidelines, gathering up the momentum needed to launch into a spinning cartwheel-cum-somersault every bit as spectacular as the long-range strike that seconds earlier would earn Thailand the first of their four ASEAN Football Federation Championship titles to date.

Twenty years on, when the AFF Suzuki Cup kicks-off in November, it will be Kiatisuk's job to defend the title his team won in 2014 with a two-legged victory over Malaysia as he

continues steering his country back towards the summit of the regional and continental scenes.

"The era that I was playing in was quite a good time for Thailand," says Kiatisuk with

"THE ERA THAT I WAS PLAYING IN WAS QUITE A GOOD TIME FOR THAILAND."

some understatement.

"We were fourth at the Asian Games twice and we won the South East Asian Games quite often and we got into the last 10 of qualifying for the World Cup in Asia.

"But unfortunately after I stopped playing, the standard of the team dropped for some time. We felt we had a down time before, but the Thai national team is trying to pick up the pace again, to match the past. But it's going to take time; we'll have to do it step-by-step."

Thailand's roll of honour during Kiatisuk's time as a player makes impressive reading: the country reached the semi-finals of the Asian Games in both 1998 and 2002, won the gold medal at the SEA Games in 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999, and were ASEAN Football Federation Championship winners (then known as the Tiger Cup) in 1996, 2000 and 2002.

In addition, Thailand carried the standard

for South East Asia into the AFC Asian Cup in Lebanon in 2000 – a tournament Kiatisuk missed because of injury – and, a year later, advanced for the first time to the final phase of the continent's qualifying campaign for the FIFA World Cup.

But after a decade as South East Asia's leading nation, and the one that looked most likely to break into the top tier of the Asian game, Thailand slowly started to slide.

As age caught up with Kiatisuk and a talented team featuring the likes of Tawan Sripan, Worrawoot Srimaka, Dusit Chalermson and Surachai Jaturapattarapong, the next generation was not of comparable quality.

Thailand dropped down the rankings and were challenged – and eventually replaced – by Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia. While South East Asia in general slipped further behind the likes of Japan, Korea Republic and Iran.

The arrival of Australia as an AFC member in 2006, meanwhile, made life even tougher.

After looking like being the South East Asian nation most likely to break into the Asian elite at the turn of the millennium, Thailand failed to qualify for the finals of the AFC Asian Cup in both 2011 and 2015.

But while Thai football had endured a



chastening period, the country's renaissance was starting to take hold, believes Kiattisuk, at the South East Asian Games in the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw in 2013.

A first gold medal at the U-23 tournament since 2007 saw Kiattisuk earn his spurs as a coach, with several players – along with Kiattisuk himself – graduating to the full national side over the next 18 months as well as steering Thailand into the finals of the AFC U23 Championship in Qatar.

"The time in Naypyidaw was the initiation, but now we have a good team and we're back in the final 12 again," says the man known as 'Zico' since his playing days after his Brazilian idol and who has ensured Thailand will play in the final phase of qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

"So I'm trying to build up the national team, take it back to where it was and hopefully we can go beyond what the team I played in accomplished."

That will be no easy feat, but with Kiattisuk applying the lessons learned under coaches such as Englishman Peter Withe, the former forward does not lack confidence. He wants to bring back the glory days, when Thailand were selling out the Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok on a regular basis.

"What was really memorable for me during my career was the reaction of the fans and when they gave everyone their support,

Top Left Tiger Cup 1996

Bottom Left Asian Games 1998

Above Tiger Cup 2000

"WHAT WAS REALLY MEMORABLE FOR ME DURING MY CAREER WAS THE REACTION OF THE FANS AND WHEN THEY GAVE EVERYONE THEIR SUPPORT, ESPECIALLY AT THE RAJAMANGALA STADIUM."

especially at the Rajamangala Stadium," he says.

"The stadium's huge, and when it's packed full of our fans, then it's one of the inspirations for me. When we played under Peter Withe we had a really strong team, but the strongest memory is the fans, and I'm trying to bring that back and rebuild the atmosphere, like the game when we played against Kuwait (in the semi-finals of the 1998 Asian Games) and the fans were enjoying it and they were going crazy and showing their passion. We want every game to be like that. That matters to me.

"I've always wanted to convey the heart of our players to our fans. The Thailand national team wasn't strong for a while, but in the past

few years we've got stronger again and we've had a professional league in Thailand for a few years now and having football as a career for the players means they are much stronger than in the past.

"But it comes with the challenge of dealing with the egos of the players, how to control them. The challenge is going to be how to convey my strategy to players who are always in the first team of their club and allow them to be competitive and try to grab the position in the national team. But the most important is to show the heart of the players, playing for their country and let the fans feel that."

The landscape in Thai football has changed markedly since Kiattisuk's days as a player, with the Thai Premier League (TPL) offering a more stable and professional environment for the country's talent to be nurtured, developed and enhanced.

Over the last five years, Muangthong United and Buriram United have both proven themselves capable of performing against the continent's best in the AFC Champions League, with Buriram reaching the quarter-finals in 2013.

"The Thai Premier League is only five or so years old and of course it still needs a lot of improvement," says Kiattisuk.

"Journalists and fans always say that our





league is a tough competition and is strong, but I still see a lot of improvements that need to be made. It's not yet mature.

"If we look at the J.League, it took them 10 to 20 years for that to boom and mature and I hope that one day the Thai Premier League will learn from that. And of course the good thing from that will be bringing professionalism to the players and more players to select for the national team. So once the league is strong, the national team will be stronger.

"Several teams from the TPL have played in the AFC Champions League for a few years and they have faced teams like Guangzhou Evergrande, FC Seoul, some Japanese teams. They can play up to their standard and that gives them the belief that they can compete with them. The Thai players plus a few foreign players can play against these teams. Our national team has to hope to be able to do that too and that experience is going to help."

The advent of professionalism and the growth in popularity of the league, however, can be a double-edged sword, but Kiattisuk's status as an icon of the Thai game has made it easier for the coach to handle everything the job has thrown at him as he seeks to lead by example.

"My reputation and all my accomplishments from the past help me a

Left & Above
AFC U23 Championship 2016

lot," he says. "I don't want the players to only know that I want them to succeed, but I want them to know that I have done it before and I have experienced these accomplishments and how to get to this goal before.

"Ultimately, I don't want to tell them what to do, but to convey it and have faith in my methods, in the training and everything. Most importantly, I'm not just teaching them about strategy, but I can also demonstrate and provide a good example both on the training field and also in the tactics of the game.

"Because of what I've done in the past the players look up to me and have faith that if they will follow my instructions that they can be successful one day too and reach their goal.

"My main philosophy when it comes to training centres on discipline. We have a few young players and some senior players and some superstar players from our league, but the most important thing for me is that the team wins as a team, not only because of one superstar. Discipline is the most important aspect of my strategy.

"With all the coaches I played under, I picked up the main philosophy from all of them and discipline was always one of the most important things, and fitness too. So I

picked up my favourite bits from what they did. Sometimes I contact my old coaches, people like Peter Withe, and we discuss some ideas."

Having seen his team impress at the AFC U23 Championship in Qatar, despite exiting at the group stage after facing eventual champions Japan as well as DPR Korea and Saudi Arabia, Kiattisuk is hoping continued regional dominance at the AFF Suzuki Cup at the end of the year will spur Thailand on to further improvements at continental level.

"Tournaments like the Suzuki Cup or the SEA Games will definitely bring confidence to the team and winning these competitions automatically displays that Thailand is the number one in ASEAN, so it brings up morale for the team," he says.

"With that confidence, it allows us to look ahead to compete against the great teams of Asia like Japan, Korea Republic and Saudi Arabia. We are trying to raise our standard and trying to grab the opportunities. If we perform well in World Cup qualifying, we will be able to play at the Asian Cup as well. So we need consistency in participating at a higher level, at an Asian level.

"We have to be ambitious and we'd like more chances to play against teams like Japan to build up our standard so we can be more familiar with playing those higher ranked teams."

THE SUCCESSOR

MOHANAD ABDULRAHEEM MAY NOT HAVE SCORED THE WINNER IN THE AFC ASIAN CUP FINAL, BUT THE STRIKER IS WELL ON THE WAY TO FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF IRAQ ICON YOUNUS MAHMOOD HAVING STARRED AT JANUARY'S AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP AND SCORED A CRUCIAL GOAL IN THE RECENT JOINT QUALIFIERS.

By: Andrew Mullen Photo: Lagardère Sports

With any icon, the inevitable question which follows can often be who will take up the mantle and follow in those footsteps.

For Iraq, the legend is 2007 AFC Asian Cup winning captain Younus Mahmood, the man who scored the headed goal in Jakarta that brought so much joy to the then war-torn nation. The man who had also led his country to the bronze medal play-off at the 2004 Olympic Games.

And with Iraq securing a place in the third round of qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup as well as automatic qualification for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup and a place at the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil, Mohanad Abdulraheem is the name aiming to tread in those trailblazing footsteps.

Tall and quick, Abdulraheem has an eye for goal to match whether, it be on the ground or in the air, all traits that could also be attributed to Mahmood.

Having scored the only goal in the final of the AFC U-22 Championship at the start of 2014, Abdulraheem continued to show his appetite for the big stage after netting vital goals in the knockout rounds at the 2016 AFC U23 Championship in Doha including in the crucial third place play-off against hosts Qatar as Iraq secured their qualification for Brazil.

And Abdulraheem then netted the only goal at the end of March as Iraq completed a 1-0 win over Vietnam to secure automatic qualification for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup as well as a place in the third round of qualifiers for the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

"Younus Mahmood is one of our legends in Iraq football and me and other team-mates, as promising players from Iraq, look to Younus as our idol," says 22-year-old Abdulraheem.

"I hope to reach his level and be his successor."

And so far, with those goals and attributes to his name, the signs are that the striker has the potential to emerge from the shadow of Iraq's most capped player.

Named AFC Young Player of the Year in 2012 after winning the MVP accolade as Iraq finished runner-up at that year's AFC U-19 Championship final thanks to his five goals, Abdulraheem has already established himself as a first team regular for the national side.

"I was very happy to be named the best player in 2012. This was not only down to me, but I also owed this to my colleagues who helped me and did their best to enable me to get this title," adds Abdulraheem.

Abdulraheem showed he belongs at the top level soon after as the striker helped Iraq reach the final of the 2013 Gulf Cup, but despite providing the assist for Mahmood in the final against the United Arab Emirates, the Lions of Mesopotamia eventually lost 2-1 after extra-time.

"There were many players, not only me, who were promoted from the youth team and Olympic team to the national team for the Gulf Cup and it was always an ambition," says Abdulraheem.

"It was a good experience to have and now I have a permanent position in the national team."

There was better still to come from Abdulraheem as the striker again helped Iraq reach another final a year later, this time at the AFC U-22 Championship.

And after helping his side finish fourth at the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup with a batch of players which featured a large number of national team regulars including Dhurgham Ismail and Ali Adnan, Iraq's hugely talented group under the tutelage of Hakeem Shakir advanced to the final with a 100% record after seeing off both Japan

and Korea Republic.

Then after 33 minutes at Seeb Stadium in Muscat, Abdulraheem showed his pace to break away from the Saudi Arabia backline before calmly producing a composed finish across the goalkeeper and into the far corner.

"It was a very difficult tournament. We had a good experience from taking part in the FIFA U-20 World Cup," adds Abdulraheem.

"We played very well against some good teams and we were able to reach the final and go on and claim the title."

And in Doha earlier this year, Abdulraheem again helped Iraq reach the latter stages of the AFC U23 Championship having scored and provided an assist in extra-time of the thrilling quarter-final success over the UAE.

Having been used sparingly during the group stage after only just recovering from injury prior to the tournament in Doha, Abdulraheem struck in the first half of extra-time with an emphatic close range finish high into the net before helping seal the 3-1 win by unselfishly setting up team-mate Amjed Attwan Kadhim.

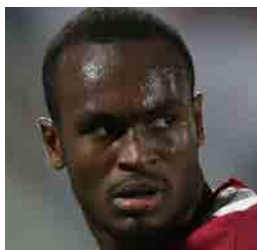
Iraq's first attempt to qualify for a return to the Olympic Games for the first time since 2004 ended in heartbreak after Japan scored a stoppage time winner in the semi-final.

But after Abdulraheem had struck with four minutes remaining of normal time at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium against hosts Qatar with a header of his own, team-mate Ayman Hussein scored the extra-time winner as Iraq secured a 2-1 victory to claim the third and final qualification berth for Brazil.

And he continued his hot streak in front of goal by netting against Vietnam in Tehran as Iraq finished as the best second placed team in the second round of joint qualifiers.

"The more I play the more my ambitions grow," says Abdulraheem. "I have played for the U-19 and Olympic team, and now I am with the national team, my biggest dream is to qualify for the World Cup and also eventually play in Europe."

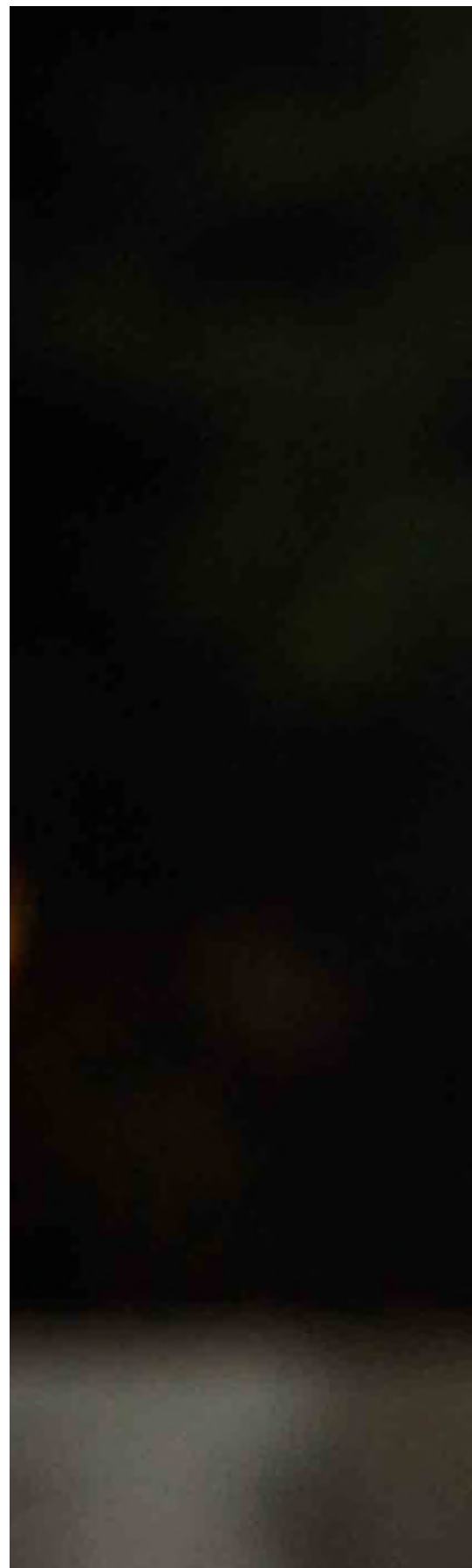




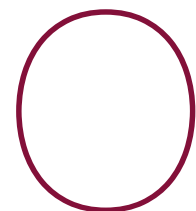
STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

ABDELKARIM HASSAN
STARRED FOR QATAR AT THE
AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP
IN JANUARY, BUT DESPITE
MISSING OUT ON THE
OLYMPIC GAMES, THE AL
SADD DEFENDER HAS HIS
SIGHTS SET ON ADDING
MORE TO HIS ALREADY
IMPRESSIVE CV.

By: Michael Church **Photos:** Lagardère Sports







n the field of play, it's difficult to mistake Abdelkarim Hassan for anyone else; he may be only 22 years old, but the all-action Qatari full-back has already become one of the

standout performers in west Asian football.

His presence is such, Hassan looks more imposing than his 1.86 metre stature. Taller than the average left-back, he dominates as he marauds forward, pounding down the left flank for Qatar and Al Sadd.

Despite his youth, Hassan already has the kind of resume most players fail to acquire throughout an entire career.

First capped for his country at 17, by which time he was already an AFC Champions League winner, the Doha-born defender has now made in excess of 50 appearances for his national team and was part of the side that won the Gulf Cup in late 2014.

"At my age there is no other player who has won titles like this and I hope to do more or achieve more," says Hassan.

"(Winning the AFC Champions League) was a big thing for me, I was the youngest in the team and maybe in the tournament and I got a lot of experience.



"We had a lot of hard moments and until now I've got experience from this tournament. It strengthened my game and I can say even if I was afraid or was nervous, I got a lot of experience from that moment."

Nerves are not something often associated with Hassan, who is quietly confident away from the game and tackles every question comfortably in English. His self-assuredness made him a key player even at such a young age for Al Sadd when the club embarked on a remarkable run that ended with victory over Korea Republic's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors in the 2011 AFC Champions League in final.

The Qatar Stars League club, who had previously won the continental club crown back in 1989, kicked off their attempt to win the title in the play-offs before emerging unbeaten through the group stage.

Few gave the Qataris any hope of winning the title, but wins over Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab, Sepahan from Iran and Suwon Samsung Bluewings from Korea delivered Jorge Fossati's team to the final, where they eventually saw off Jeonbuk on penalties.

His performances in the AFC Champions League success underlined a maturity beyond Hassan's tender years, a quality that had already been seen at national level, both within Qatar's age group teams and also the



full national side.

By the time of the AFC Champions League success, Hassan had already earned his first appearance for Qatar almost a year earlier, joining the squad for friendly matches against Oman and Haiti in November 2010.

"When I was young I never thought I'd play in the senior national team," he says. "I was sitting on the bench and I was watching the game, but I was lucky that the coach gave me the chance and I proved that I could be with them in a big game."

Over the following four years, Hassan would make the left-back position for the national team his own, and by late 2014 he was part of the squad that won the Gulf Cup, the first time Qatar had claimed the hotly contested biannual regional title since 2004.

That ensured the Qatar team went into the AFC Asian Cup finals in Australia in early 2015 amongst the favourites, but despite their status, Djamel Belmadi's team were one of the first to exit, dropping out at the end of the group stage following a disappointing campaign.

"In Australia I was there, we had a strong team, but it was so difficult and we had a lot of problems against the United Arab Emirates in our first game," says Hassan of a match Qatar lost 4-1, a chastening defeat that left the team under pressure in their remaining

Top Left AFC U23 Championship 2016

Far Left & Bottom Left AFC Champions League 2011

Below Joint 2018 FIFA World Cup & 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers

Left AFC Champions League 2015

Above AFC Champions League 2016



contests.

"But I learned how to deal with these kind of games, I spoke to our players in the Olympic team and explained to them how important the first game is. We have to be cool, not nervous, to deal with this game, even if we are losing 1-0 we have to keep cool and continue to fight."

Not surprisingly, Hassan was one of the key players in Qatar's attempt to qualify for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, captaining the team as the nation hosted the AFC U23 Championship at the start of 2016.

His impact on the tournament was immediate, scoring twice – including an unstoppable drive into the bottom corner – in Qatar's opening win over China before continuing to impress throughout the competition, scoring twice more to finish in third place on the goal scorers' chart despite playing in the defence.

"As everyone knows I play as a left-back, but with my style of attack I like to join the strikers, to help, to attack more, to give an advantage to the forwards and if I get the chance to score I will do it," he says.

"I like to do that. Everyone knows that before in defence you had to stay back but the new tactic is to join the attack and so I try to do my best to help the team."

For all his – and his team's –



NIKON CORPORATION nikkor.com

At the heart of the image



unquestioned quality Qatar fell short of booking their ticket for Brazil.

Despite a strong starting line-up, a lack of depth in their squad saw Felix Sanchez's side fade in the latter stages of the tournament, losing to Iraq in the third place play-off for the final place at the Olympic Games.

But Qatar's under-23 side underlined that the work being done to build the national side towards the 2022 FIFA World Cup, when the country will host the global jamboree, is bearing fruit.

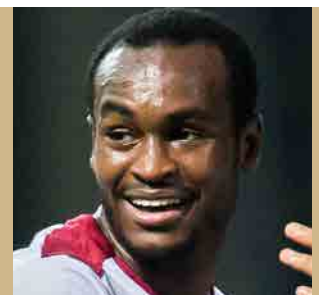
And Hassan will, fitness and form permitting, likely be a key part of the team that represents the country in six years' time.

Before that, though, Qatar are attempting to seal qualification for Russia in 2018 and Hassan is hopeful he and his compatriots can finally achieve that particular goal after impressing so far in qualifying.

"It's a dream of the country and a dream of any player to be at the World Cup and I would be proud to be there," he says. "Me and my team-mates will fight to be there.

"As a player, to play in a World Cup in my country it would be a great pleasure. I hope I will be in good health so I can play at the World Cup in Qatar."

Above & Below Joint 2018 FIFA World Cup & AFC Asian Cup 2019 qualifiers



Abdelkarim Hassan

Nationality: Qatar

DOB: 28/08/1993

Position: Defender

Current club:

Al Sadd (Qatar)



STAR MAN

FC TOKYO
MIDFIELDER SHOYA
NAKAJIMA WAS
NAMED THE MVP
AT JANUARY'S AFC
U23 CHAMPIONSHIP
AS JAPAN LIFTED
THE TITLE IN DOHA
TO QUALIFY FOR
THE 2016 OLYMPIC
GAMES IN BRAZIL.

By: Andrew Mullen **Photos:** Lagardère Sports/Courtesy of FC Tokyo







Despite being a teenager playing in the AFC U-22 Championship at the start of 2014, Japan's Shoya Nakajima raised his hand in a team meeting when the question was asked who wanted to be MVP at the tournament in Oman.

He and his team ultimately fell short in Muscat, but fast forward two years to Qatar at the start of 2016 and Nakajima left Doha's Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium clutching the MVP award for the 2016 AFC U23 Championship as well as a winners medal after Japan recorded a thrilling comeback victory over Korea Republic in the final having qualified for a sixth consecutive appearance at the Olympic Games.

"I am happy because we were aiming to win the tournament. We were under pressure because Japan has qualified for the Olympics every time, and also because it was such a tough tournament," says FC Tokyo midfielder Nakajima.

"We were always told that our generation just cannot win the tournament, so I am even happier and we gained self-confidence."

The 3-2 win over Korea Republic, secured thanks to two goals from substitute Takuma Asano either side of a Shinya Yajima header

inside the final 30 minutes, erased memories of the 2014 tournament in Muscat which led to some of those doubts ahead of the 2016 edition as Japan exited in the quarter-finals despite three goals in four games from an obviously confident Nakajima.

Having seen Japan reach the bronze medal play-off at the Olympic Games in London in 2012, hopes had been high ahead of the 2014 tournament in Oman, although qualification for the Olympics was not on the line due to the new tournament structure.

But despite that confidence, Japan started slowly in Muscat as back-to-back draws against Iran and Kuwait had threatened their chance of progress from Group C.

Japan, though, beat already qualified group winners Australia 4-0 on the final Matchday thanks to two goals and an assist from Nakajima to seal a place in the quarter-finals.

With his aims of becoming MVP, Nakajima opened the scoring after 18 minutes with a first-time finish from inside the area before his pull-back set up Japan's second not long after at Royal Oman Police Stadium.

And the then Tokyo Verdy midfielder, having scored Japan's third goal in the earlier 3-3 draw with Iran with a vicious swerving strike from the edge of the area, then added his second with a confident penalty at the start of the second half to seal the win.

But a 1-0 defeat by eventual champions Iraq ended Japan's campaign at the quarter-final stage.

"Because of the games in Oman two years ago, I expected a tough level of opponents this time round," adds Nakajima.

"It was a regrettable experience, but that led us to this goal."

There were, though, to be no regrets for Nakajima and Japan in Doha, as despite pre-tournament concerns, Japan made the ideal start in Group B with a 1-0 win over DPR Korea.

Having registered a full 90 minutes in the tournament opener, Nakajima was rested for the 4-0 win over Thailand as coach Makoto Teguramori made full use of his squad, which became a key feature for their success, before the midfielder returned for the 2-1 Matchday Three victory against Saudi Arabia as Japan topped the table with a 100% record.

Japan were then forced to hold on in their quarter-final with Iran before eventually prevailing 3-0 after extra-time thanks to two spectacular goals in three minutes from Nakajima.

After Yuta Toyokawa's 95th minute header had finally opened the scoring at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Nakajima added a second with a curling strike from the corner



of the penalty area before rifling high into the roof of the net from a more central position after again cutting in from the left wing.

The diminutive midfielder remained in the side for the 2-1 semi-final success over Iraq, which secured automatic qualification for the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil, as well as for the final success over Korea Republic.

And after providing the assist for Asano to net the dramatic winner with nine minutes of the final remaining, Nakajima was named the tournament's MVP having improved throughout the campaign with his quick feet and creativity crucial to Japan's success.

"I could have played better. This title of MVP is not only for me, but for all of us so I am proud of it. I'm very, very happy with the game and becoming champions, and also to be honoured with the MVP award," says Nakajima, who also scored twice against Vietnam during the qualifiers.

"There were a few performances that I was satisfied with, and the coach had been giving me confidence and he kept using me throughout the tournament.

"I believed I could put in a performance that would lead to the team's victory and I'm really pleased that we were able to be the champions.

"The happiest moment is when we won the tournament and qualified for the Olympics in

*Above AFC U23
Championship 2016*

Rio.

"The two goals in the Iran game also gave me confidence and that was one of my ideal performances."

Prior to the 2014 tournament in Muscat, Nakajima had made a name for himself in the Japanese second division in 2012 and 2013 after scoring six goals in just over 30 appearances for Tokyo Verdy having progressed through the junior ranks at the club.

That included four goals in eight appearances during the 2012 season having scored the 83rd minute equaliser on his Tokyo Verdy league debut less than a month after his 18th birthday having been introduced as a substitute against Avispa Fukuoka just five minutes earlier.

"I do not think age matters in football. For the difference of physical size, it was important for me how to get closer to goal without getting caught. Thinking fast and moving fast is one of the strengths of Japanese football players and I tried my best," says Nakajima, who had made his first appearance for Tokyo Verdy a few days earlier as a half-time substitute in the 3-0 Emperor's Cup win over Verspah Oita.

"I make the most of all the experience I have gained, and this gives me a lot of confidence. I am glad that all the effort I have made led to the victory this time.

"I remember I started football because my cousin was playing football. It was simply so fun playing with a ball and I gradually devoted my time to it."

After he joined FC Tokyo, Nakajima then spent part of the 2014 season on loan at second division side Kataller Toyama, scoring twice in 28 appearances.

And despite the Toyama club eventually finishing at the foot of the table to be relegated to the third tier, Nakajima was adjudged to be ready for the top flight and made his J.League debut for FC Tokyo against Kashima Antlers at the end of August 2014 as a 78th minute substitute a week after his 20th birthday as the visitors snatched a 2-2 draw at Kashima Soccer Stadium with an equaliser three minutes from time.

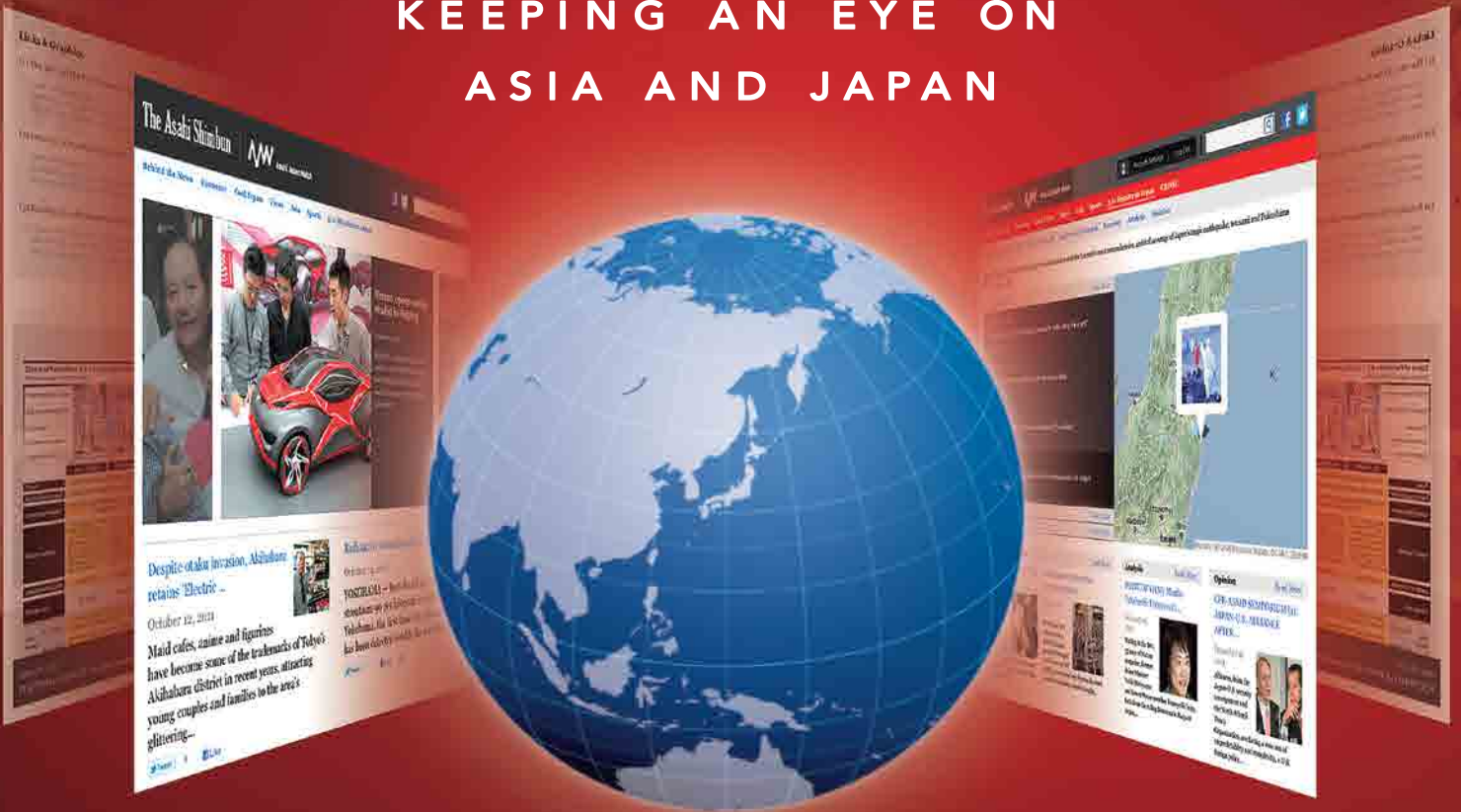
Nakajima eventually made five appearances for FC Tokyo during the 2014 J.League season before racking up a further 13 in 2015, which included his maiden top flight goal from the bench in a 2-1 comeback win away at Sagan Tosu in June.

FC Tokyo finished the 2015 season in fourth, and shortly after Nakajima returned from the AFC U23 Championship, Hiroshi



The Asahi Shimbun AJW

KEEPING AN EYE ON ASIA AND JAPAN



The Asahi Shimbun AJW (Asia & Japan Watch)

(<http://ajw.asahi.com/>) is the English-language digital version of The Asahi Shimbun, Japan's leading daily newspaper. Founded in 1879, The Asahi Shimbun is the nation's most respected daily Japanese-language newspaper. AJW offers a multifaceted news lineup for Japan and Asia, especially China and the Korean Peninsula.

The site features quality content unique to The Asahi Shimbun, including analysis and investigative articles, opinion pieces by Asahi reporters and outside experts, and other reports aimed at a global readership.

The Asahi Shimbun has a circulation of nearly 8 million. The newspaper prides itself on its investigative reporting and analyses of business and political coverage, as well as insightful stories on Japan's fascinating subculture.

AJW offers unparalleled coverage of the Fukushima nuclear plant accident. The coverage has received positive feedback from many experts around the world.

The site also runs selected articles from The Asahi Shimbun GLOBE.

Subscription Plans

To commemorate the site's launch, a special discount rate of \$11.96 (one month) is available. For further inquiries, email Customer Support (customer-support@asahi.com).



Left & Above Playing
for FC Tokyo

Jofuku's side secured their second AFC Champions League appearance with a comprehensive 9-0 victory over Thailand's Chonburi in the play-offs.

And Japan will hope Nakajima and his team-mates can maintain the form shown in Doha ahead of August's Olympic Games in Brazil as the Samurai Blue look to build on the bronze medal play-off appearance in London

"The target right now is to get a medal in the Rio Olympics and we will try our best," says Nakajima, who was part of Japan's expanded training squad ahead of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and scored with his first touch after coming on as a substitute in the 7-0 pre-tournament friendly win over Newcastle-based side Lambton Jaffas.

"Since the creation of the team, I have been playing throughout, and the main objective was to qualify for Rio de Janeiro and we knew how tough the Asian qualifying games would be, so I'm relieved.

"But we are very eager for the future, to develop and improve, so we can reach the medals at the world stage, so we have to try to do more."



Shoya Nakajima

Nationality: Japan

DOB: 23/08/1994

Position: Midfielder

Current club:
FC Tokyo (*Japan*)

Previous clubs:
Toyko Verdy, Kataller Toyama
(*both Japan*)



MAKING AN IMPACT

INTERNATIONAL MIDFIELDER
STEPHAN SCHROCK HAS
GIVEN THE UNITED FOOTBALL
LEAGUE IN THE PHILIPPINES A
MASSIVE BOOST BY JOINING
CHAMPIONS CERES LA SALLE
AS THE MANILA-BASED CLUB
MAKES A PUSH FOR GLORY
IN THE 2016 AFC CUP.

By: Cedelf Tupas Photos: Lagardère Sports

Reigning United Football League champions Ceres La Salle had just wrapped up their first win of the season in thrilling style on a humid February night, but the euphoria from the victory was far from over. This was not just a routine win to start the campaign, even if it came against one of the league's powerhouse sides, Loyola Meralco Sparks. A crowd of teenagers and young

children gathered near the Ceres bench, hoping to get a piece of the champions' new signing.

Stephan Schrock is used to the attention, much like when he was playing at his boyhood club, Greuther Furth in Germany. But he is still left in awe over the number of people trying to get photos with him or just his signature on their shirts.

"I didn't expect this, but you know me, I'm here to help Philippine football whatever way I can," the player fondly called







Schrocky says.

It may be too early to tell, but the Schrock effect is slowly but surely impacting the United Football League (UFL) and once again raising the profile of Philippine football. Attendances had plateaued for the past couple of years and games have been reduced to delayed coverage on television.

And while stars like Phil Younghusband and Misagh Bahadoran still ply their trade with Loyola and Global FC, the UFL needed crowd drawers and Schrock's homecoming could not have come at a better time with the Philippine Football Federation poised to take the next step by forming a National League.

With Schrock making his debut on the weekend, a spike in attendance was already noted even though his duel with national team team-mate Younghusband would have to wait since the Azkals captain was still sidelined by injury.

"A player of Schrock's calibre is surely a boost to the league," said UFL general manager Rely San Agustin.

"We're happy to have him here, watch him week in and week out. He will help raise the level of play of the league and also attract a crowd because he has a following here."

Schrock joined Ceres in January after the club based in the central city of Bacolod

agreed a six-month loan deal with Furth.

It's one of the more unique deals being consummated in world football - a young club halfway around the world acquiring a player who just a couple of seasons ago returned to his boyhood club after a stint in the German top flight.

Just a couple of seasons ago, Schrock was locking horns with one of the best left-sided combinations in the world in Franck Ribery and David Alaba in a league match pitting Bayern Munich with Eintracht Frankfurt, where he spent one season.

Under the terms of the deal, Schrock needs to be back during the next transfer period in Germany having turned down interest from another UFL club.

"It was always been a dream for me," Schrock says of his move to the Philippines. "I had some ideas, like at the end of my career that I would love to play in the UFL or in the Philippines. That moment came a little bit earlier so I'm happy that it happened."

Schrock is proud of his Filipino roots and has his mother's family name, Cabizares, tattooed as well as the three stars and a sun - a symbol of the Philippine flag.

"I had some offers from Germany as well as Thailand and the Middle East, but I was talking to my wife and she said 'If you're leaving the

country (Germany), why don't you go to the Philippines?' So here I am," he adds.

Ceres welcomed Schrock, 29, with open arms and was unveiled at a press conference along with fellow new signing Kevin Ingreso before the start of the season last January.

It was not just an introduction of the club's new signings, but a strong statement of intent for the club to make waves not just in the UFL but also at the Asian level after Ceres qualified for the AFC Cup group stage after ruling the league last season.

"It's all been very professional," says Schrock of his new club,

"It's a good organisation, like a big family. Everyone is friendly and has an open hand for you. They are helping you out, giving you advice. They sort out everything for you."

On the pitch, Schrock is helping raise Ceres' stock, and although he did not score until his second game of the season, his pace and quality has stood out for the UFL champions.

Playing just behind Spanish striker Adrian Gallardo in the Ceres formation, Schrock has thrived in his free role in midfield and he has already scored a handful of goals in the UFL Cup.

But it is in the AFC Cup where Schrock



Stephan Schrock

Nationality:
Philippines

DOB:
21/08/1986

Position:
Midfielder

Current club:
Ceres La Salle (*Philippines*)
Greuther Furth (*Germany*)

Previous Clubs:
Hoffenheim,
Eintracht Frankfurt
(*both Germany*)

has caught the eye. He provided a goal and an assist as Ceres salvaged a 2-2 draw against Selangor of Malaysia to start their campaign at a packed Panaad Stadium in Bacolod.

Schrock's opening goal against the Malaysian side served as a reminder of his prodigious traits as he picked up the ball on the edge of the penalty area, and after giving himself space, rifled the ball into the bottom corner much to the delight of the partisan home crowd.

Attendance was pegged at 8,000, but it could have been more with the cracking atmosphere at the stadium. It was reminiscent of the early days of the Azkals back in 2011 when they played their first game in the stadium against Mongolia in the AFC Challenge Cup qualifier after their historic semi-final run at the AFF Suzuki Cup.

Selangor had looked like it was about to spoil Ceres' debut only for Schrock to help rescue the hosts' blushes, as with three minutes plus stoppage time remaining, he surged forward before crossing to Gallardo to head home at the far post.

"It's an amazing feeling to score here in our AFC Cup debut at home," said Schrock. "The crowd was amazing tonight and we're happy we gave them something to cheer about. The

Far Bottom Left AFC Challenge Cup 2014

Left & Above AFC Cup 2016

Far Top Left Against Pakistan in October 2013

city and crowd kind of reminds me of Furth. Maybe that's why I feel very at home here."

The fans could not get enough of Schrock after the match and the Ceres midfielder obliged for selfies and autographs, delaying the departure of the team bus.

Schrock has formed a formidable partnership with Gallardo as his perfectly weighted ball released the Spanish striker for the opening goal in the 2-0 away win over Bangladesh's Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club on Matchday Two in Dhaka.

"The football style in South East Asia is different from the football played in Germany and Europe," he adds.

"I'm not judging and saying that Europe is better or South East Asia is better, but it's just different. I think it's more physical here and more technical in Germany."

Schrock had been called up for national team duties as early as in 2009, but only made his Azkals debut against Sri Lanka in a FIFA World Cup Qualifier two years later. He has since scored four goals for his mother's country so far.

"I think for us, as a team, it's better," says Philippines coach Thomas Dooley.

"He doesn't have those 18 hours on his legs, the time change and the climate change. Now he can get used to his teammates a little bit more, and he's only an hour away from the team when we get together. I think this is a plus for the team.

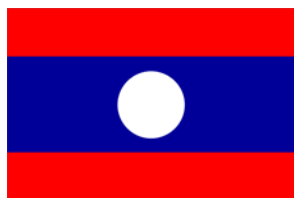
"I think it's better to play over here and get playing time rather than fighting over there for playing time and not being able to play. I'm glad that he is here at the moment. Now we can ask more from him."

The Philippines missed out on remaining in the hunt for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, but have the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in their sights after coming so close to qualifying for the 2015 edition after losing the 2015 AFC Challenge Cup final to Palestine, while the AFF Suzuki Cup will also take place at the end of the year.

"I want to win trophies, that's why I'm here," says Schrock.

"The Azkals can only be successful in the coming years if the league takes the next step. The Azkals' success and the league's success go hand in hand.

"If people don't follow the league, why should they follow the Azkals? That's how it works in Europe."



FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

LAOS ARE LOOKING TO
THE FUTURE AHEAD OF
THE QUALIFIERS FOR
THE AFF CHAMPIONSHIP
WITH THE EXPANDED
LAO PREMIER LEAGUE
PAYING OFF FOLLOWING
A BREAKTHROUGH
SUCCESS IN THIS YEAR'S
AFC CUP.

By: Michael Church Photos: Lagardère Sports







Left & Above Tiger Cup 1998

Below Tiger Cup 2000

As South East Asian cities go, Vientiane is understated and low key; the Laos capital may lack the hustle, bustle and high rise skylines of the major urban hubs in the region, but what it misses in frenetic energy it more than makes up for in charm and character.

Off-shift taxi drivers play boules down tree-lined side streets while the city's architecture – like the preferred forms of gentle recreation – bears hints of the country's past as a French colonial outpost.

Home to almost seven million people, Laos is not among the strongest football nations in the ASEAN region, but that is not to say the country does not harbour the ambition to amend its status.

Laos has long drifted around at the lower end of the FIFA Rankings, and it is rated at 178th as of the start of March. However, foundations are being put in place to try to pull the country up to a new level.

With the Lao Football Federation seeking to harness the infrastructure put in place for

growing and developing thanks to the assistance of FIFA, the AFC and the ASEAN Football Federation.

"The government gave their full support via the sporting infrastructure because they invested in a new sports complex," says Lao Football Federation (LFF) general secretary Xaybandith Rasphone.

"So, after the SEA Games, we needed to maintain and make use of the facilities that were built, because they cost a lot of money.

"The government asked the sports federation to take care of each of the stadiums, or fields of play, in tennis, shooting and basketball, and it was the same for

178

Laos' FIFA Ranking in March 2016

football. The previous LFF executive committee agreed to take over and to maintain and make use of the facilities."

The positive developments in Laos go far beyond hosting tournaments and growth in the administration, however.

The new Lao Premier League season kicked off in March with 14 teams, six more than when it started, with an increased emphasis on privately owned clubs over those from government departments as had been the case in the past.

"The clubs who participated in the



league before were coming from amateur organisations, like the ministries and so on," says Xaybandith.

"Now they have been privatised, two or three clubs are like that. And we have teams from the provinces now, too, not just Vientiane.

"We started with the league in the first year with eight teams. Of course, we have had leagues before, but the teams were

1951

Lao Football Federation Founded

the country's hosting of the South East Asian Games in 2009, progress has been steady ever since, with the national association



Below
AFF Suzuki Cup 2006



Left & Above AFF
Suzuki Cup 2008

mainly from the government sector. However, the government didn't have the budget, so the private sector picked up those clubs and things have grown.

10

Laos have appeared at every AFF Championship since its inception in 1996

"In 2012 we went up to 10 and last year we had 11 and this year it is 14. That's why we have asked AFC to help us as well, with league development, club licensing and the like. We haven't done these kind of things before."

Some clubs, such as last season's runners-up Lanexang United, have, due to significant private investment, been able to build their own stadium while an increasing number of foreign players are joining Laotian clubs with 49 registered across the 11 clubs last season, with that number set to rise again this season.

League rules allow clubs to employ seven foreign players while implementing a 3+1+1 rule that means three non-Asian foreigners as well as one Asian and one overseas player of Laotian heritage are permitted to play in league games.

"We are trying to attract overseas Lao

players, but the problem is dual nationality is not allowed in Laos, not like in Philippines or Timor Leste," says Xaybandith.

"But Lanexang has brought in players from Australia and France and they have played well. They are projecting a new image.

"We have the 3+1 rule, like the AFC, but we also have another plus one and that's to allow players of Lao origin to join the starting line-up. So, while he's registered as a foreigner, they can be fielded.

"We have support from FIFA and AFC, but also Corporate Social Responsibility projects from local companies or Non-



Governmental Organisations who are doing their own projects and we try to combine all of those to work on grassroots from eight to 12, then from 14, 16 and so on.

"The situation is picking up and some of the provinces and the clubs are starting their own youth teams. We can't call them academies yet, but they have clubs and they want to grow.

"It's not about how many years this will take, but we want the people to be part of the progress and of the development and to support the team, support their boys and girls while they do these activities.

"We will host the AFC qualifiers for the ASEAN group for U-14s and in the last four years we have tried to be quite active, especially last year because of the World Cup qualifiers and the other competitions, so we were busy. We are doing a lot of building, the staff love their jobs and things are going well."

Next up for Laos' national team are the qualifying rounds of the AFF Suzuki Cup in October, when the country will attempt to maintain its perfect record of appearing at the finals of every one of the regional tournaments since its inception in 1996.

But with Timor Leste making rapid improvements, and Cambodia and Brunei also featuring, the task will be tough for a team that is currently without a head coach.

There have been encouraging signs, however, for Laotian football in the AFC Cup and hopes are high that improvements seen at club level can transfer over to the national

2-1

Lao Toyota FC beat India's JSW Bengaluru in this year's AFC Cup



team after Lao Toyota FC secured the country's first-ever win in the continental club tournament when they defeated India's JSW Bengaluru 2-1 at home in February.

"We've always qualified for the finals phase of the Suzuki Cup," says Xaybandith. "But Timor Leste is building and improving so it will be harder.

"We haven't found a head coach yet so maybe we will use a local coach. We don't know yet, but we will try. We've had foreign coaches for the last 10 years or more but one of the things we are trying to do is produce more coaches locally.

"We have a good group of people coming through and we will try to make use of them. They ask us to give them a chance; they know the people and the language. They have led the youth teams, so we have to try. That's the strategy we are trying to deploy, and if it doesn't work we will try again.

"The LFF executive committee and the technical committee will work together to see which path we will take, and then I will help them execute. For us, the league is the emphasis for us this year.

"We're learning a lot through working with the AFC. Many of our staff are still young, some are still under 20 and have freshly graduated. They love football, but we are trying to get players who are at the end of their career to work with us. They need to go through some education background, but that's what we want to do."



Left & Above AFC Challenge Cup 2014

Bottom left & Right AFC Cup 2016

Below & Bottom AFF Suzuki Cup 2010



Q&A



**General Secretary
Lao Football
Federation
Xaybandith
Rasphone**

How has the Lao Football Federation looked to develop and improve?

We had a new committee in 2010 and we needed to learn, but we were eager to develop football. We wanted to do something. At some meetings with the AFF, they were asking who wanted to host their U-16 and U-19 tournaments and so on and we said yes, why not? We started to host those events and there was interest, even though our national team wasn't so good yet. But the management was trying to strengthen the organisation. At that time we started with seven or eight people and now we have more than 40, so that's a big jump. We want to do it professionally and to do real development so that we can catch up with the others as well because we are always behind.

What support has the Lao Football Federation received?

"The Japan Football Association is also providing some support. We had a technical director from Japan and also the head coach was from Japan. They have come in to develop the programme with us. We also have sponsors who are trying to do a lot of work. The community and business has endorsed everything we are doing. The only thing is that the results of the national team have not been good.

How is the Lao Premier League benefiting from the 3+1+1 rule?

We plan to reduce the number of foreigners by one player each year over the next couple of years, but for now some of the clubs still need those foreigners. The next step then is for the league to go professional, but the fans are looking for results from the national team. At the minute, our team always loses, but we're always trying to work on the grassroots. We are trying to deliver as much as possible.

TEEN SENSATION

YEMEN'S AHMED AL SARORI SCORED A SPECTACULAR LONG RANGE STRIKE AT THE 2016 AFC U23 CHAMPIONSHIP, HAVING ALREADY ESTABLISHED HIMSELF FOR THE FULL NATIONAL TEAM WELL AHEAD OF HIS 18TH BIRTHDAY LATER THIS YEAR.

By: Andrew Mullen Photo: Lagardère Sports

Goals in back-to-back joint 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers, as well as a spectacular long range strike at January's AFC U23 Championship, capped a whirlwind few months for Yemen's teenage forward Ahmed Al Sarori.

Having only made his debut for the Yemen national team shortly after his 17th birthday in a friendly with Oman in Muscat at the end of August last year, just days later Al Sarori made his first competitive appearance as an early substitute against Uzbekistan in Tashkent at the start of September.

Yemen did eventually lose the game 1-0, but after playing the full 90 minutes in defeats by Bahrain and DPR Korea, Al Sarori's chance arrived on 12 November at Rizal Memorial Football Stadium in Manila against the Philippines.

Having been introduced midway through the second half with the qualifier still goalless; Al Sarori struck what proved to be the winner with seven minutes remaining as Yemen claimed a first win of the campaign as the striker fired home from inside the penalty area having skipped away from a challenge.

"I made my international debut in a friendly against Oman. This gave me a lot of self-confidence and experience, and then when I started to play in the official games, I got even more," says Al Sarori.

"Against the Philippines, we really wanted to win this game. It was an amazing experience for me and we were able to win.

"Earlier I had missed a chance as I was not lucky, but with the second chance I was

lucky and was able to score.

"I always wanted to play for the national team, and now I have the chance, I will look to continue to play well and hold onto this chance as a main player in the team. I am not a substitute anymore, this is something I wanted to achieve, and now I have it."

Al Sarori also came off the bench to score a few days later against Uzbekistan, although Yemen lost 3-1 in their temporary adopted home of Qatar.

That brought an end to Al Sarori's camp with the national team, although with the AFC U23 Championship taking place in Doha, the striker remained and joined up with the country's Olympic team.

"I was with the national team for two months, then the U23 team arrived and we started that camp two months before the U23 championship," he adds.

"It is a very long time as I wanted to see my family. With the situation in Yemen, we know it was difficult, but we were in touch over the telephone."

Yemen eventually finished at the bottom of their group having lost to eventual Olympic Games qualifiers Iraq and Korea Republic as well as Uzbekistan.

"We had a very tough group and we had no chance against Korea and Iraq," says Al Sarori. "Overall I am satisfied, we wanted to qualify, but we tried our best."

But for Al Sarori and Yemen, the tournament did end on a high, or more accurately, a long note, as the striker found the net with a perfectly executed strike from over 40 yards with eight minutes remaining of the 3-1 defeat by Uzbekistan.

"I saw the goalkeeper was going forward and I am happy to score this goal," he adds. "I have scored the same goal

before."

Al Sarori began his international career in 2010, and having played at the AFC U-14 Festival of Football in 2012, featured in the 2014 AFC U-16 Championship qualifiers in Uzbekistan in 2013.

Yemen failed to qualify for the finals, but despite having only just turned 16, Al Sarori was selected for the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship in Myanmar and scored the only goal in the 1-0 win over Iran.

"I was red carded in the last game before the championship and in the first game against Myanmar I didn't play, but I played in the second game against Iran and scored. But we lost the last game and were unable to qualify," says Al Sarori.

"We made a lot of effort after a long camp in Doha, but we could not qualify."

And then despite his age, Al Sarori made the step up to the full national team for the joint 2018 FIFA World Cup and 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers as well as January's AFC U23 Championship.

And Al Sarori's strike against Uzbekistan was Yemen's only goal of the campaign having earlier lost 2-0 to Iraq and 5-0 to Korea Republic.

Following the completion of the tournament, Al Sarori was finally able to return home to resume training with domestic side Al Ahli.

"I play for the top team in Yemen. They are a very strong and well known team and I have been playing there for six years," says Al Sarori, who played the full 90 minutes of Yemen's final joint qualifier with Bahrain at the end of March.

"I want to play professionally with a club, and for Yemen, I want to bring happiness to the Yemen people by scoring and qualifying for championships."



RISING STAR

ONE OF THE LEADING LIGHTS OF UZBEKISTAN'S NEW GENERATION, REIGNING AFC YOUTH PLAYER OF THE YEAR DOSTONBEK KHAMDAMOV IS LOOKING TO BUILD ON A STELLAR 2015 SEASON AND SHINE BRIGHT FOR CLUB AND COUNTRY.

Interview: Behzod Nazarov By: Daniel Pordes Photo: Lagardère Sports

In the late evening of June 4 last year, in Christchurch, New Zealand, Dostonbek Khamdamov's 2015, which culminated with him being honoured with the award for Asia's best young talent, looked like it would be far from the stellar success it became.

His nation, Uzbekistan, had suffered a comprehensive 3-0 defeat to Germany in their second 2015 FIFA U-20 World Cup group stage tie which left the Central Asians on zero points following an exciting, but ultimately unsuccessful, 4-3 defeat to Honduras in their opener and Khamdamov and his team-mates saw an early exit from the tournament beckoning.

But victory over Fiji in their final group outing saw Uzbekistan book a place in the last 16 after the 3-0 win, coupled with Honduras' heavy defeat to Germany, saw them leap from bottom to second place in Group F.

And faced with an Austria side who had eliminated six-time winners Argentina in the group stage, the then 18-year-old forward Khamdamov rose to the fore, scoring two second half goals to eliminate the Europeans.

A second yellow card of the tournament did, however, see Khamdamov miss out on the 1-0 quarter-final defeat to Senegal, but the competition had already become a pivotal moment in the Bunyodkor midfielder's career.

"The U-20 FIFA World Cup was really an excellent experience in all aspects for us," recalls Khamdamov.

"We tried to play well and show the quality of Uzbekistan youth football. Our goal had been to get to the semi-final, but unfortunately we lost out to Senegal in a game I couldn't play due to a suspension, which was disappointing for me.

"But I remember two events much better than others. First of all, my goals against Austria in the Round of 16. I helped us to win that game and we qualified to the quarter-final.

"Then, our game against Germany in the

group stage, even though we lost, that really gave us a good experience."

Those experiences and fine performances were duly recognised in November at the AFC Annual Awards as Khamdamov was chosen ahead of compatriots and club team-mates Eldor Shomurodov and Zabikhillo Urinboev as AFC Youth Player of the Year.

"It was a very great honour for me to be named AFC Youth Player of the Year," says Khamdamov.

"I didn't expect three players of Bunyodkor and the Uzbekistan U-20 national team would be in the nominees list, so I think that the trophy is not only mine, but it belongs to all the players who played with me during last year."

Khamdamov's first taste of the game came through watching football matches on television at a young age and, with the support of his parents, began his path in professional football when he joined the Football Boarding School Yangiyer as a 10-year-old before progressing to the youth academy of Tashkent giants Bunyodkor three years later.

Continental success with his nation came not long after as he started every game in Uzbekistan's 2012 AFC U-16 Championship-winning campaign, netting in the 3-2 semi-final victory over Iran, and Khamdamov was a member of the side that reached the last 16 at the 2013 FIFA U-17 World Cup.

And progress on the domestic front soon followed as he made his professional debut for Bunyodkor in June 2014, a month before his 18th birthday, as he came off the bench to replace Uzbekistan forward prodigy, Sardor Rashidov, against Olmalik in the Uzbekistan Cup.

"I will never forget that day. It was my first game for Bunyodkor and I was a little bit nervous," recalls Khamdamov of the tie Bunyodkor would win 4-0 courtesy of Rashidov's hat-trick.

"The coach brought me on for the final 15 minutes and I will always remember it

as the first steps in my professional career."

Since that day, Khamdamov has continued from strength to strength as he first helped Uzbekistan reach the semi-finals of the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship and thereby qualify for last year's memorable FIFA U-20 World Cup campaign, before participating in his first AFC Champions League campaign with Bunyodkor in 2015.

An even more important part of the Tashkent club's 2016 continental adventure, as his brace in their opener against 2015 Saudi Arabian champions Al Nassr demonstrated, 19-year-old Khamdamov, has shown he is not fazed by the continent's biggest stage.

"I am getting really great experience from playing in the AFC Champions League, which I need very much," says Khamdamov.

"In the AFC Champions League you play each game against strong clubs and strong players and I am happy and very fortunate to play with Asia's best teams in this competition.

"The Uzbek League has also been improving in the last few years and competition is very difficult for the top places in the league and it is not easy to make the top three.

"I understand that every day, through these competitions, I should try to progress further and I am always trying to improve as a player."

Developing as a footballer is a key mantra for the teenager, and despite disappointingly crashing out in the group stage of January's AFC U23 Championship, where Khamdamov still managed two goals in three games, the Bunyodkor starlet has his eyes on an even bigger prize.

"Last year was very good and there were many important events for me, but now my aim is to go to Russia for the 2018 FIFA World Cup with our senior national team," he says.

"Every fan and every player in Uzbekistan wants it. I hope to break into the squad of the senior national team and to qualify together for the World Cup."





BREEDING SUCCESS

KOREA REPUBLIC'S SUWON SAMSUNG BLUEWINGS WON BACK-TO-BACK ASIAN CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS AND THE K-LEAGUE CLASSIC SIDE ARE BACK IN THE AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IN 2016 UNDER FORMER PLAYER AND CURRENT COACH SEO JUNG-WON LOOKING TO REPLICATE THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED IN THE EARLY 2000s.

By: Paul Williams Photos: Lagardère Sports







When Suwon Samsung Bluewings were formed by the global brand in 1995, they had one simple goal – become one of the

biggest teams in Asia.

And with two Asian Club Championship and Asian Super Cup triumphs, four K-League titles, three FA Cup and six League Cup titles in their bulging trophy cabinet, it is safe to say that in their 21 years of existence they have achieved their goal.

In their debut season, Suwon came within a whisker of ultimate success, losing the championship play-off 3-2 on aggregate to Ulsan Hyundai. Silverware would come soon enough, however, winning their first K-League title in 1998 and backing it up in 1999.

“Back in 1998 and 1999, Suwon had such strong financial support,” says former captain and current coach Seo Jung-won. “We were full of confidence after winning the K-League consecutively. We never thought about losing even a single game. We kept our winning

spirit even when we allowed the first goal of the game. That’s how we could be the champions.”

A large part of their initial success can be attributed to legendary manager Kim Ho, who coached the club from inception through until 2003 and oversaw the most successful era at the club, winning a trophy in every season from 1998 to 2002.

“Kim Ho is a very clever and passionate person,” says Park Kun-ha, who played over 200 games for Suwon between 1996 and 2006. “I could learn a lot from him because he had a very straight goal of developing Korean football. I have met so many different coaches, but Kim was the most influential teacher to me.”

Success meant a chance to test their mettle against the best teams in Asia in the Asian Club Championship, and in their first appearance in 2000, they would make the semi-final, eventually succumbing to Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal.

After an impressive debut performance, the new kings of football in Korea Republic were determined to go one better in 2001; however their campaign almost came

unstuck at the first hurdle.

Drawn to play Maldivian side Hurriya in the second round play-off, Suwon only won 2-1 in the first leg, setting up a potentially tricky return leg in the Maldives.

They survived, just, labouring to a 0-0 draw to secure their place in the quarter-final group stage, which was conducted in Makassar in Indonesia over just five days.

First up were 1999 champions Jubilo Iwata from Japan, who recorded a 3-0 win over Suwon.

“I was very upset about the loss,” recalls Park. “That game became my motivation to win the next (two) games.”

Those next two games were in stark contrast to the first; an 8-1 win over hosts PSM Makassar, followed by a 6-0 defeat of China’s Shandong Luneng.

Those two wins were enough for Suwon to finish second in the group behind Jubilo, who advanced with a perfect record.

The semi-finals, in which Suwon would face Iranian side Persepolis, would take place two months later and Suwon had a distinct advantage over all other clubs – the semi-finals and final were to be played in



Suwon.

"Suwon back then had a really good squad and also a nice team chemistry as well, I believed we could win the title even if the semi finals and the final were played somewhere else," adds Seo.

The home ground advantage counted for little when 22-year-old midfielder Hamed Kavianpour opened the scoring after 12 minutes to give the Iranian side the lead.

"We allowed the first goal, but we didn't

"We never thought about losing even a single game. We kept our winning spirit even when we allowed the first goal of the game. That's how we could be the Champions."

**Former captain and current coach
Seo Jung-won**

*Far Top Left
Kim Ho*

*Top Left
Seo Jung-won*

*Far Bottom Left &
Bottom Left
Asian Super Cup 2001*

think we were going to lose," adds Seo.

"We could see the opponents were exhausted in the second half and thought if we snatch some chances then we might get a win."

And it was Seo who drew his side level when he tapped home from the goalline after a corner was flicked on at the near post, and suddenly Suwon was back in the game.

As the clock ticked over into the 90th minute the match looked destined to go into extra-time, until Park intervened.

"We were losing by 1-0 and I was substituted on in the second half 20 minutes before the end of the game," says Park.

"When Ko Jong-soo had the ball, I was running behind the opponent's defenders to create a goal scoring chance. Luckily, I scored a header. I was so happy about not missing the opportunity that was given to

me."

The dramatic turnaround meant Suwon were into the final, where they would once again meet Jubilo in what would be the club's first match at the new Suwon World Cup Stadium, built for the FIFA World Cup the following year.

"When we met Jubilo in the final, we really welcomed the challenge as we had a second chance," Seo says.

"We lost 3-0 in the group stage, but I remember that we had a better performance. We couldn't score when we had chances and allowed the goals after Jubilo's counterattacks and set-pieces. That made our players so upset and we really wanted to wipe out the disgrace of that defeat."

And a first half goal from Brazilian Sandro Cardoso was enough to give Suwon a narrow 1-0 win and the title of Asian champions.

"Finally, we had our revenge," Seo adds.

The win set up a clash with Saudi side Al Shabab, winner of the Asian Cup Winners' Cup, in the Asian Super Cup, and Suwon won 4-3 to complete the continental double.

"Not only was the game decided by my winning goal, but it was the final of the Asian



competition," recalls Seo.

"The goal still remains the best and the most exciting goal in my memory."

With both titles in the cabinet, the club set about achieving something no side had ever done – defending both titles.

"My goal was to make Suwon Bluewings a world class football team," Park says.

In 2002 there would be no repeat of the near miss against Hurriyya as Suwon saw off Sri Lankan side Saunders SC in the second round play-off after an 18-0 win in the first leg.

Two wins and a draw, a goalless stalemate against compatriots Anyang LG Cheetahs, who are now FC Seoul, in the quarter-final group stage saw Suwon advance to the semi-finals, which in 2002 were to be played at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran.

And three second half goals to Seo, Alen Avdic and Lee Sun-woo saw Suwon ease past Uzbekistan's Nasaf and gave them a chance to defend their title against fellow K-League side Anyang.

Like their game in the group stage, the two teams could not be split after drawing 0-0, meaning the title would be decided by a

"My goal was to make Suwon Bluewings a world class football team."

Former player Park Kun-ha

penalty shootout and Suwon prevailed after recording a 4-2 win.

"Anyang was a rival team in Korea," Park says. "So our victory is more valuable because we won the tournament by beating our rival."

The club achieved a further slice of history in 2002 by defending their Asian Super Cup title with a penalty shootout victory over Al Hilal.

And with the advent of the AFC Champions League the following year, which combined the Asian Club Championship and Asian Cup Winners' Cup, Suwon remain the only club to win back-to-back Asian Super Cups.

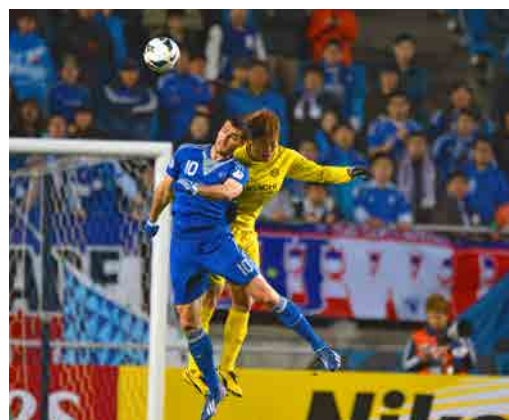
Fast forward 14 years to 2016 and Suwon, who finished second in the K-League Classic in 2015, were drawn in Group G of the AFC

Champions League alongside Melbourne Victory, Shanghai SIPG and Gamba Osaka, looking to return to the summit of Asian football for the first time since 2002, with Seo now in the dugout.

"Those glory days were with strong financial support and star players in the squad," says Seo. "But now Suwon wants to breed our own players and win trophies with them. I think the current objective of the club is harder to achieve. I feel it is a more meaningful challenge than the one in the old days."

Alongside him in the dugout are a number of players from that history creating 2001/02 team – Lee Byung-keun, Ko Jong-soo and Shin Bum-chul – creating a distinct Suwon identity at the club.

"Our club has a pride as the best football club in South Korea and having our own philosophy," Seo adds. "Sharing and understanding of this identity throughout the whole coaching staff is the best asset and advantage that Suwon has."



Far Left
Cha Bum-kun

Top Left AFC Champions
League 2016

Top Right AFC Champions
League 2013

Left AFC Champions League
2011

Right AFC Champions
League 2015

Bottom Right
Seo Jung-won

Below Suwon World Cup
Stadium

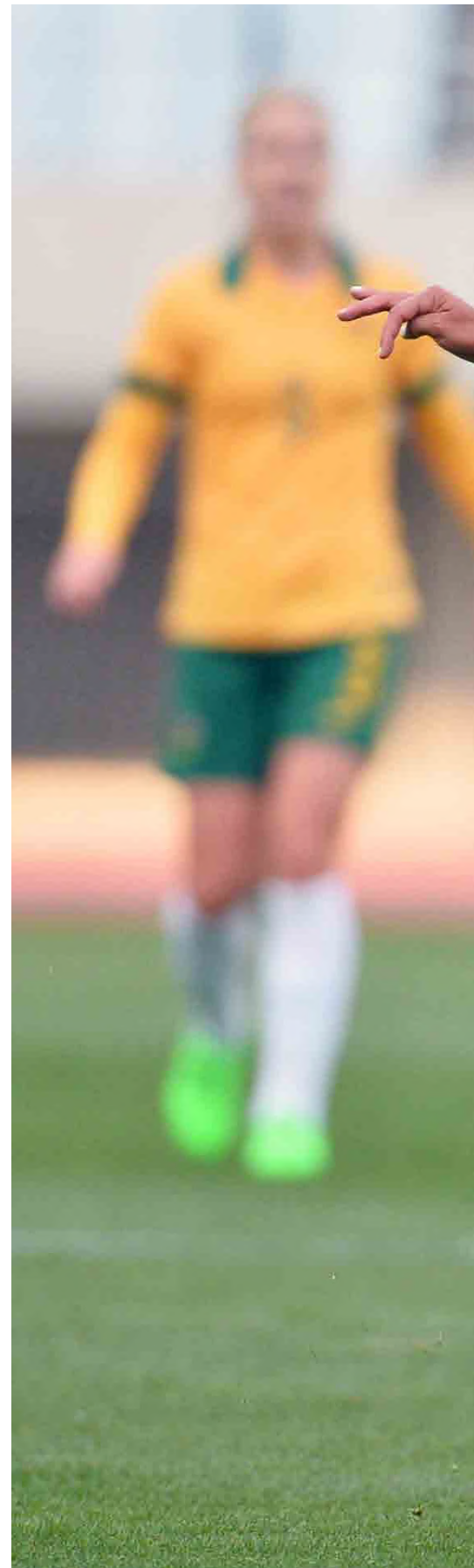




THE DREAMER

KYAH SIMON SCORED
FOUR GOALS AS
AUSTRALIA BOOKED
THEIR PLACE AT THE
2016 OLYMPIC GAMES
BY WINNING ASIA'S
QUALIFYING TOURNAMENT
IN OSAKA EARLIER THIS
YEAR HAVING ALREADY
MADE A NAME FOR
HERSELF AT HOME AND
ABROAD.

By: Scott McIntyre Photos: Lagardère Sports/Getty Images







Most footballers dream of making it in the professional ranks as children, sitting around watching their heroes at the stadium or on television; Kyah Simon knew that was her path almost as soon as she had played her first match.

"I remember after my very first couple of sessions as an eight-year-old that I went home to mum and I told her straight away that I'm going to play for Australia one day; I'm not quite sure what she made of it at the time!" says Simon.

Looking back now, with more than half a century of Matildas caps to her name at the age of just 24, it might have all seemed somehow preordained, but football was not even her first love as a young girl.

Growing up in the western suburbs of Australia's largest city, Sydney, Simon began playing sport as a six-year-old but that was the rough and tumble of rugby league, before football took a hold.

"Both my dad and my brother played rugby league so that's where everything started," she adds.

"I played that from six till almost 10 and with football starting when I was eight I had

several years where I was forever jumping from one sport to the next.

"I remember being in the back of my parents' car and having to madly rip off my league shirt to put on the football one, so that was a lot of fun."

Eventually football was the sport that won out, but right the way up to the age of 13, Simon played exclusively in boys' teams.

"I didn't want to stop playing with the guys, but there was a rule at the time which said I had to, so I started to play for local club sides near where I grew up and eventually made it to the state level program where I first started working with Staj," says Simon.

'Staj' is the name by which almost all the current Matildas crop refer to their coach, Alen Stajcic and the pair's relationship goes back almost a decade.

"I first coached Kyah when she was 14 or 15 and she's always been a wonderful person and a great player," says Stajcic.

"Right from the beginning she had that determination and drive and was always a dreamer, dreaming of big goals and wanting to achieve certain things, but she always made sure that she put in the work to achieve them."

And after seeing Simon score a tournament-high four goals to help lead Australia to top spot at the AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016 qualifiers in Osaka in

March, Stajcic had some even higher praise for the now 24-year-old.

"Kyah was fantastic for us in Osaka and she looked the sharpest she has in many years, she was creative, dangerous, brought others in play and scored goals," he adds.

"For me she's already shown she's a world-class player, but I think she has the ability to be one of the top two or three strikers in world football."

High praise indeed, but her performances in Osaka certainly went some way to justifying those claims as the Matildas breezed through the tournament undefeated, with Simon grabbing a hat-trick against Vietnam and also scoring inside the first minute against Korea Republic.

"There was no golden ball or that type of thing, but the only type of gold we're dreaming of is that medal in Rio," adds Simon.

There was a steely determination throughout the entire Australia camp during the 10 days in Osaka and Simon repeats the mantra that many others within the Matildas set-up did during that qualification tournament.

"Qualifying for Rio was just the first one of our goals and we never had any doubt that we'd be able to achieve that; we beat some of the best teams in the world and even



though we know we still have a lot to improve those results put us in a strong position," she says.

As a nation where sporting success holds a strong place in the national psyche, the Olympic Games are the pinnacle for many athletes in Australia, with this being the first time the Matildas have qualified since 2004.

"Now that we've qualified for Rio we don't just want to go there and say we made an Olympics, but we want to really put our stamp on the tournament," adds 2010 AFC Women's Asian Cup winner Simon.

"We're going to Brazil to compete for a medal and if we continue to do the little things right before then, making sure we're as fit, as fast and as well prepared as we can be then we have the right to say we are aiming to be on that podium at the end of the Games."

Beating some of the best teams in the world as they did in Osaka when they defeated DPR Korea 2-1 and saw off 2012 silver medalists Japan 3-1 is a sure boost for confidence, but the Matildas might not be everyone's favourites when they hit the spiritual home of football later in the year.

That as a result of Australia eliminating Brazil at last year's FIFA World Cup courtesy of an 80th minute goal from Simon.

"Brazil has such a strong, unique history with football and when you think of the

Far Left AFC Women's Asian Cup 2008

Left AFC Women's Asian Cup 2010

Above FIFA Women's World Cup 2015

Below Olympic Games Qualifiers 2016



country you think of football first," she says.

"They're certainly football mad over there, but we might get a bit of slack for knocking them out of the World Cup.

"It's definitely fitting though that the tournament is in Brazil, and that we'll be there with so many other great athletes and it's an experience we'll be able to remember for the rest of our lives, but we're going there to

create our own history, and that's to win a gold medal."

As strong-minded as she was growing up, the road to the top has been far from a smooth one for the player who plies her trade almost year-round in both Australia's W-League and for National Women's Soccer League outfit Boston Breakers.

In her very first top-flight match in Australia, as a 15-year-old, a slide tackle broke Simon's leg in two places; an injury that she took almost a year to recover from.

Then, after making her Matildas debut at the age of 16 and carving out a formidable goal-scoring record at a host of W-League clubs and on the international stage, injury struck again when she ruptured her ACL in late October 2013 while on loan at Western Sydney Wanderers.

"Kyah's had her share of injuries down the years and overcome them every time which just shows how mentally strong she is; she has such a great work ethic and her mentality is also a wonderful attribute," says Stajcic.

It is that determination that's always been there, right from the eight-year-old who declared she would follow exactly the path that she has taken thus far.

The indigenous athlete, who has just started her own football clinics in Australia to "help those who don't always have the same



NIKE.COM



chances that I did" and who also has her life beyond football pretty much mapped out.

The striker admits to 'occasionally' lying awake at night, dreaming about business opportunities in the field of financial planning where she is already employed during her time back home playing in the W-League.

Before all that though there is a chance to follow in the footsteps of one of Australia's greatest athletes, 2000 Olympic gold winner, Cathy Freeman, who, like Simon, was a proud indigenous athlete.

"That 2000 Olympics, I was eight and just started playing football, and that really resonates with me – I went to some of the Paralympic events, but never managed to get Olympic tickets. But I still remember Cathy Freeman lighting the cauldron for the opening ceremony and that was a moment in itself and then when she won the gold medal it was such a historic event," says Simon.

"Now, for us, we know it's going to be overwhelming going to Rio and we have to dream big and aspire to reach our goals because if you don't aim high then you'll never reach them.

"That means dreaming of making that final match in Brazil and dreaming of standing on that podium with a gold medal around our neck."

*Above Olympic Games
Qualifiers 2016*

*Below W-League Grand
Final winner with Sydney
FC 2013*



Kyah Simon

Nationality: Australia

DOB: 25/06/1991

Position: Forward

Current club:

Boston Breakers (USA)
Sydney FC (Australia)

Previous clubs:

Central Coast Mariners,
Western Sydney Wanderers
(both Australia)

Qualifying Line-Up Confirmed

Group winners Qatar, Korea Republic, Japan, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Uzbekistan and Iran as well as best second placed finishers Syria, Iraq, China and the United Arab Emirates advanced

for the third round of 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifiers and also secured places at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup following the conclusion of the second round in March.

After becoming the first side to advance in November having beaten Hong Kong 2-0 on the penultimate Matchday to take top spot in Group C, Qatar lost 2-0 to China who secured the runner-up spot.

Korea Republic had also guaranteed their progress ahead of the March fixtures, and a 1-0 win over Lebanon confirmed their 100% record in the second round as they finished on top of Group G.

Japan also topped their standings with a final day 5-0 win over Syria ensuring they won Group E.

Syria also progressed after claiming one

Second Round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Saudi Arabia	8	6	2	0	28	4	24	20
UAE	8	5	2	1	25	4	21	17
Palestine	8	3	3	2	22	6	16	12
Malaysia	8	1	1	6	3	30	-27	4
Timor Leste	8	0	2	6	2	36	-34	2

11/06/15
Malaysia 1 (Safae Sali 34) Timor Leste 1 (Ramon Saro 90+3)
Saudi Arabia 3 (Yahya Al Shehri 6, Mohammed Al Sahlawi 47, 90+3) Palestine 2 (Pablo Bravo 51, Matias Hadwa 90+2)
16/06/15
Timor Leste 0 United Arab Emirates 1 (Omar Abdulrahman 80)
Malaysia 0 Palestine 6 (Musab Battat 9, Sameh Maraaba 22, 75, Tamer Seyam 41, 89, Khader Abuhammad 63)
03/09/15
United Arab Emirates 10 (Mohanad Salem 16, Ali Mabkhout 22, 33, 75, Ahmed Khalil 24, 29, 71, 78, Habib Al Fardan 25, Mohamed Gharib 39) Malaysia 0
Saudi Arabia 7 (Yahya Al Shehri 3, Mohammed Al Sahlawi 23, 26, 71, Salman Al Faraj 30, Fahad Al Muwallad 74) Timor Leste 0
08/09/15
Palestine 0 United Arab Emirates 0
08/10/15
Timor Leste 1 (Ramon Saro 54) Palestine 1 (Ahmad Abu Nahyeh 90+2)
Saudi Arabia 2 (Mohammed Al Sahlawi 45, 90) United Arab Emirates 1 (Ahmed Khalil 18)
13/10/15
Timor Leste 0 Malaysia 1 (Amri Yahyah 10)
09/11/15
Palestine 0 Saudi Arabia 0
12/11/15
Palestine 6 (Jonathan Zorrilla 37, Ahmad Abu Nahyeh 38, 45, 58, Tamer Seyam 88, Jaka Ihbeisheh 90+1) Malaysia 0
United Arab Emirates 8 (Ali Mabkhout 15, 19, Ahmed Khalil 43, 53, 56, 57, Abdullah Mousa 54, Ahmed Al Hashmi 87) Timor Leste 0
17/11/15
Timor Leste 0 Saudi Arabia 10 (Mohammed Al Sahlawi 29, 42, 55, 70, 89, Osama Hawasawi 34, Yahya Al Shehri 35, Taisir Al Jassim 85, Naif Hazazi 90, Fahad Al Muwallad 90+2)
Malaysia 1 (Baddrol Bakhtiar 59) United Arab Emirates 2 (Omar Abdulrahman 22, Ahmed Khalil 52)
24/03/16
United Arab Emirates 2 (Ismail Al Hammadi 33, Ahmed Khalil 60) Palestine 0
Saudi Arabia 2 (Mohammed Al Sahlawi 50, Taisir Al Jassim 74) Malaysia 0
29/03/16
Palestine 7 (Jaka Ihbeisheh 2, Jonathan Cantillana 18, 66, Yashir Pinto 32, 39, Ahmed Awad 77, Abdelatif Al Bahdari 90) Timor Leste 0
United Arab Emirates 1 (Omar Abdulrahman 52) Saudi Arabia 1 (Taisir Al Jassim)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Australia	8	7	0	1	29	4	25	21
Jordan	8	5	1	2	21	7	14	16
Kyrgyzstan	8	4	2	2	10	8	2	14
Tajikistan	8	1	2	5	9	20	-11	5
Bangladesh	8	0	1	7	2	32	-30	1

11/06/15
Bangladesh 1 (Valerii Kichin 32 OG) Kyrgyzstan 3 (Anton Zemlianukhin 9, 41, Edgar Bernhardt 29)
Tajikistan 1 (Manuchehr Dzhalilov 67) Jordan 3 (Hassan Abdel Fattah 29, 64, 88)
16/06/15
Bangladesh 1 (Jahid Ameli 50) Tajikistan 1 (Fathullo Fathuloev 87)
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Almazbek Mirzaliev 90+2)
Australia 2 (Mile Jedinak 2, Tommy Oar 68)
03/09/15
Australia 3 (Mathew Leckie 6, Tom Rogic 8, 20, Nathan Burns 29, Aaron Mooy 62) Bangladesh 0
Jordan 0 Kyrgyzstan 0
08/09/15
Bangladesh 0 Jordan 4 (Adballah Deeb 14, 57, Monther Abu Amara 33, Yaseen Bakheet 59)
Tajikistan 0 Australia 3 (Mark Milligan 57, Tim Cahill 74, 90+1)
08/10/15
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Bakhtiyar Dutshebekov 7, Anton Zemlianukhin 90+4) Tajikistan (Manuchehr Jalilov 65, Akhtam Nazarov 71)
Jordan 2 (Hassan Abdel Fattah 47, Hamza Al Dardour 84) Australia 0
13/10/15
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Vitalij Lux 27, Ildar Amirov 89) Bangladesh 0
Jordan 3 (Hamza Al Dardour 65, 90+4, Hassan Abdel Fattah 67) Tajikistan 0
12/11/15
Australia 3 (Mile Jedinak 40, Tim Cahill 50, Ildar Amirov 69 OG) Kyrgyzstan 0
Tajikistan 5 (Manuchehr Jalilov 16, 26, 59, 74, Akhtam Nazarov 51) Bangladesh 0
17/11/15
Bangladesh 0 Australia 4 (Tim Cahill 6, 32, 37, Mile Jedinak 43)
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Anton Zemlianukhin 48) Jordan 0
24/03/16
Australia 7 (Massimo Luongo 3, Mile Jedinak 13, Mark Milligan 57, Nathan Burns 67, 87, Tom Rogic 70, 72) Tajikistan 0
Jordan 8 (Hamza Al Dardour 7, 23, 40, Abdallah Deeb 29, Yousef Ahmad 32, Baha Faisal 63, Yousef Al Naber 82, Ahmad Saleh 93) Bangladesh 0
29/03/16
Australia 5 (Tim Cahill 24, 44, Aaron Mooy 39, Tom Rogic 53, Massimo Luongo 69) Jordan 1 (Abdallah Deeb 90)
Tajikistan 0 Kyrgyzstan 1 (Vitalij Lux 18)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Qatar	8	7	0	1	29	4	25	21
China	8	5	2	1	27	1	26	17
Hong Kong	8	4	2	2	13	5	8	14
Maldives	8	2	0	6	8	20	-12	6
Bhutan	8	0	0	8	5	52	-47	0

11/06/15
Hong Kong 7 (Jaimes McKee 19, 57, Christian Annan 23, Lo Kwan Yee 30, Ju Yingzhi 42, Lam Ka Wai 49, Godfred Karikari 68) Bhutan 0
Maldives 0 Qatar 1 (Ahmed El Sayed 90+8)
16/06/15
Bhutan 0 China 6 (Yang Xu 45+2, 61, 76, Wu Lei 55, Yu Dabao 67, 83)
Hong Kong 2 (Xu Deshuai 63, Lam Ka Wai 67)
Maldives 0
03/09/15
China 0 Hong Kong 0
Qatar 15 (Mohamed Musa 8, 28, Mohammed Kasola 18, Ali Asadalla 21, 45, 63, Hasan Al Haydos 25, 87, Mohammed Muntari 38, 41, 48, Ali Afif 56, Boualem Khoukhi 62, 70, Ismail Mohamed 75) Bhutan 0
08/09/15
Maldives 0 China 3 (Yu Dabao 8, 57, Zhang Linpeng 66)
Hong Kong 2 (Bai He 87, Godfred Karikari 89)
Qatar 3 (Karim Boudiaf 22, Abdelkarim Hassan 62, Mohamed Musa 84)
08/10/15
Bhutan 3 (Tshering Dorji 85, Chencho Gyeltshen 88, Biren Basnet 90+1) Maldives 4 (Ahmed Nashid 11, Ali Ashfaq 23, 33, 57)
Qatar 1 (Karim Boudiaf 22) China 0
13/10/15
Bhutan 0 Hong Kong 1 (Chan Siu Ki 89)
Qatar 4 (Boualem Khoukhi 28, 70, Mohammed Kasola 69, Mohammed Musa 90+2) Maldives 0
12/11/15
Maldives 0 Hong Kong 1 (Paulinho 13)
China 12 (Mei Fang 10, Yang Xu 13, 21, 37, 52, Yu Dabao 16, 39, Yu Hanchao 34, 72, Wang Yongpo 66, 81, Zhang Xizhe 88) Bhutan 0
17/11/15
Bhutan 0 Qatar 3 (Mohammed Muntari 22, Hassan Al Haydos 36, 90)
Hong Kong 0 China 0
24/03/16
China 4 (Jiang Ning 2, 84, 90+1, Yang Xu 12)
Maldives 0
Qatar 2 (Hasan Al Haydos 20, Sebastian Soria 87)
Hong Kong 0
29/03/16
China 2 (Huang Bowen 57, Wu Lei 88) Qatar 0
Maldives 4 (Abdullah Asadulla 37, Ali Ashfaq 81, 90+4, Naiz Hassan 87) Bhutan 2 (Chencho Gyeltshen 7, Tshering Dorji 48)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Iran	8	6	2	0	26	3	23	20
Oman	8	4	2	2	11	7	4	14
Turkmenistan	8	4	1	3	10	11	-1	13
Guam	8	2	1	5	3	16	-13	7
India	8	1	0	7	5	18	-13	3

11/06/15
Guam 1 (Serdar Annaorazov 12 OG)
Turkmenistan 0
India 1 (Sunil Chhetri 26) Oman 2 (Qasim Said 1, Amad Al Hosni 40)
16/06/15
Guam 2 (Brandon McDonald 37, Travis Nicklaw 62)
India 1 (Sunil Chhetri 90+3)
Turkmenistan 1 (Ruslan Mingazov 45+1) Iran 1 (Sardar Azmoun 4)
03/09/15
Iran 6 (Ashkan Dejagah 10, Mehdi Taremi 31, 65, Sardar Azmoun 34, 41, Mahdi Torabi 89) Guam 0
Oman 3 (Raeed Saleh 7, Mekan Saparov 11 OG, Amad Al Hosni 59) Turkmenistan 1 (Arslanmyrat Amanov 83)
08/09/15
Guam 0 Oman 0
India 0 Iran 3 (Sardar Azmoun 29, Andranik Teymourian 47, Mehdi Taremi 50)
08/10/15
Turkmenistan 2 (Guvanc Abylov 8, Arslanmyrat Amanov 60) India 1 (Jeje Lalpekhlu 28)
Oman 1 (Saad Al Mukhaini 52) Iran 1 (Jalal Hosseini 70)
13/10/15
Turkmenistan 1 (Guvanc Abylov 16) Guam 0
Oman 3 (Ahmed Mubarak 55, Abdulaziz Al Muqbali 67, 84) India 0
12/11/15
Iran 3 (Morteza Pouraliganji 6, Saeid Ezatolahi 64, Ashkan Dejagah 83) Turkmenistan 1 (Mekan Saparov 62)
India 1 (Robin Singh 10) Guam 0
17/11/15
Guam 0 Iran 6 (Mehdi Taremi 12, 63, Kamal Kamyabinia 32, Ramin Rezaeian 49, Masoud Shojaei 52, Karim Ansarifard 53)
Turkmenistan 2 (Artur Gevorgyan 40, Suleyman Muhadov 67) Oman 1 (Mohammed Al Ghassani 70)
24/03/16
Iran 4 (Ehsan Hajsafi 33, 66, Sardar Azmoun 61, Alireza Jahanbakhsh 78) India 0
Oman 1 (Ahmed Mubarak 53) Guam 0
29/03/16
India 1 (Sandesh Jhingana 26) Turkmenistan 2 (Arslanmyrat Amanov 48, Atayev Serdarali 70)
Iran 2 (Sardar Azmoun 16, 23) Oman 0

of the four best runners-up places.

Goals from Mongkol Tossakrai and Adisak Kraisorn, meanwhile, helped Thailand to a 2-2 draw against Iraq which assured the Southeast Asians of a place in the final round and a first qualification on merit for the AFC Asian Cup since 2004.

And Iraq's 1-0 defeat of Vietnam in Group F's final match saw them finish second behind Thailand to also progress.

Group A's top two sides Saudi Arabia and the 2019 AFC Asian Cup hosts the UAE each picked up 2-0 wins in their penultimate ties to set-up a crunch match at the end of March.

But the sides could not be separated in 1-1 draw which saw Saudi Arabia top the group with the UAE in second as both advanced.

Jordan, who reached the intercontinental play-off ahead of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, had also hoped to progress in a winner-takes-all decider with Australia, but a brace from Tim Cahill and further strikes from Aaron Mooy, Massimo Luongo and Tom Rogic helped the reigning Asian champions post a 5-1 win to top Group B.

A pair of 1-0 wins for Uzbekistan over the Philippines and Bahrain proved sufficient to win Group H, while DPR Korea were denied a place in the third round in dramatic circumstances after two goals in the final six minutes saw the Philippines record a 3-2 win in Manila.

And finally, a brace from Sardar Azmoun saw Iran beat Oman 2-0 in Tehran to top Group D.

The 12 teams which advanced from the second round to the third round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers will be divided into two groups of six teams to play home-and-away round-robin matches which begin on September 1.

The top two teams of each group will qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, and the two third-placed teams will advance to the fourth round play-off, for the right to face a CONCACAF representative for a place in Russia.

The remaining second placed and third placed teams advance directly to the third round of AFC Asian Cup qualifying with fixtures to begin in March 2017 following the qualifying play-offs which begin in June.

Second Round

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	8	7	1	0	27	0	27	22
Syria	8	6	0	2	26	11	15	18
Singapore	8	3	1	4	9	9	0	10
Afghanistan	8	3	0	5	8	24	-16	9
Cambodia	8	0	0	8	1	27	-26	0

11/06/15
Cambodia 0 Singapore 4 (Khairul Amri 9, Safuwani Baharudin 21, 35, Fazrul Nawaz 55)
Afghanistan 0 Syria 6 (Reja Rafe 19, 35, Mouaid Al Ajjan 40, Abdulrazak Al Husein 70, Sanharib Malki 75, Omar Kharbin 90+3)
16/06/15
Cambodia 0 Afghanistan 1 (Mustafa Zazai 86)
Japan 0 Singapore 0
03/09/15
Japan 3 (Keisuke Honda 28, Maya Yoshida 50, Shinji Kagawa 61) Cambodia 0
Syria 1 (Ouday Abduljaffar 59) Singapore 0
08/09/15
Cambodia 0 Syria 6 (Omar Kharbin 29, 39, Sanharib Malki 31, Mahmoud Al Mawas 45, Omro Al Midani 50, Osama Omari 81)
Afghanistan 0 Japan 6 (Shinji Kagawa 10, 49, Masato Morishige 35, Shinji Okazaki 57, 60, Keisuke Honda 74)
08/10/15
Singapore 1 (Khairul Amri 72) Afghanistan 0
Syria 0 Japan 3 (Keisuke Honda 55, Shinji Okazaki 70, Takashi Usami 88)
13/10/15
Singapore 2 (Faris Ramli 16, Fazrul Nawaz 47) Cambodia 1 (Sos Suhana 65)
Syria 5 (Osama Omari 9, 21, 83, Mahmoud Al Mawas 32, 90) Afghanistan 2 (Noraallah Amiri 44, Faysal Shayesteh 78)
12/11/15
Singapore 0 Japan 3 (Mu Kanazaki 20, Keisuke Honda 26, Maya Yoshida 88)
Afghanistan 3 (Mustafa Zazai 42, Noraallah Amiri 78, Khaibar Amani 90+4) Cambodia 0
17/11/15
Singapore 1 (Safuwani Baharudin 89) Syria 2 (Omar Kharbin 20, 90+3)
Cambodia 0 Japan 2 (Khoun Laboravy 51 OG, Keisuke Honda 90)
24/03/16
Japan 5 (Shinji Okazaki 43, Hiroshi Kiyotake 58, Sharif Mohammad 63 OG, Maya Yoshida 74, Mu Kanazaki 78) Afghanistan 0
Syria 6 (Omar Kharbin 7, 19 Ahmad Kallasi 57, Leng Makara 70 OG, Abdulrazak Al Husein 81, Sanharib Malki 85) Cambodia 0
29/03/16
Afghanistan 2 (Khaibar Amani 39, Mohamed Shirdel 79) Singapore 1 (Fazrul Nawaz 89)
Japan 5 (Hamdi Al Masri 17 OG, Shinji Kagawa 66, 80, Keisuke Honda 86, Genki Haraguchi 90+3) Syria 0

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Thailand	6	4	2	0	14	6	8	14
Iraq	6	3	3	0	13	6	7	12
Vietnam	6	2	1	3	7	8	-1	7
Chinese Taipei	6	0	0	6	5	19	-14	0

24/05/15
Thailand 1 (Pokklaw Anan 81) Vietnam 0
16/06/15
Chinese Taipei 0 Thailand 2 (Teerasil Dangda 21, 40)
03/09/15
Iraq 5 (Ali Adnan 37, Ali Faisal 59, Ahmed Yasin 80, Younus Mahmood 88, Justin Meram 90+1) Chinese Taipei 1 (Wen Chih Hao 86)
08/09/15
Chinese Taipei 1 (Wu Chun Cheng 83) Vietnam 2 (Dinh Tien Thanh 54, Tran Phi Son 90+3)
Thailand 2 (Theerathon Bunmathan 81, Mongkol Tossakrai 84) Iraq 2 (Justin Meram 34, Younus Mahmood 49)
08/10/15
Vietnam 1 (Le Cong Vinh 25) Iraq 1 (Younus Mahmood 90+7)
13/10/15
Vietnam 0 Thailand 3 (Kroekrit Thaweekearn 29, Dinh Tien Thanh 56 OG, Theerathon Bunmathan 70)
12/11/15
Thailand 4 (Teerasil Dangda 41, Pokklaw Anan 52, Adisak Kraisorn 72, Tana Chanabut 74) Chinese Taipei 2 (Yaki Yen 3, Hung Kai Chun 65)
17/11/15
Chinese Taipei 0 Iraq 2 (Dhurgham Ismail 19, Younus Mahmood 85)
24/03/16
Vietnam 4 (Le Cong Vinh 8, 90+1, Nguyen Van Toan 29, 42) Chinese Taipei 1 (Wu Chun Ching 7)
Iraq 2 (Mahdi Kamel 66, Ali Adnan 90+5) Thailand 2 (Mongkol Tossakrai 39, Adisak Kraisorn 86)
29/03/16
Iraq 1 (Mohammad Abdullaheem 45+1) Vietnam 0

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Korea Republic	7	7	0	0	24	0	24	21
Lebanon	8	3	2	3	12	6	6	11
Kuwait	6	3	1	2	12	4	8	10
Myanmar	8	2	2	4	9	21	-12	8
Laos	7	0	1	6	3	29	-26	1

11/06/15
Lebanon 0 Kuwait 1 (Yousef Naser 86)
Laos 2 (Khampheng Sayavutthi 81, 83) Myanmar 2 (Zaw Min Tun 41, Kyaw Zayar Win 86)
16/06/15
Myanmar 0 Korea Republic 2 (Lee Jae-sung 35, Son Heung-min 68)
Laos 0 Lebanon 2 (Mohamad Ghaddar 4, Fayeze Chamsine 75)
03/09/15
Korea Republic 8 (Lee Chung-yong 9, Son Heung-min 11, 74, 90, Kwon Chang-hoon 30, 77, Suk Hyun-jun 58, Lee Jae-sung 90+3) Laos 0
Kuwait 9 (Yousef Naser 11, 18, Ali Maqseed 13, Faisal Al Harbi 46, Abdulaziz Al Enzei 61, Bader Al Mutawa 69, 89, 90+3) Myanmar 0
08/09/15
Laos 0 Kuwait 2 (Yousef Naser 31, Bader Al Mutawa 84)
Lebanon 0 Korea Republic 3 (Jang Hyun-soo 22, Ali Hamam 25 OG, Kwon Chang-hoon 60)
08/10/15
Myanmar 0 Lebanon 2 (Hassan Maatouk 28, Abbas Atwi 90+3)
Kuwait 0 Korea Republic 1 (Koo Ja-cheol 12)
13/10/15
Myanmar 3 (Suan Lam Mang 13, Kyaw Ko Ko 32, Aung Thu 50) Laos 1 (Kampheng Sayavutthi 2)
Kuwait 0 Lebanon 0
12/11/15
Korea Republic 4 (Lee Jae-sung 18, Koo Ja-cheol 30, Jang Hyun-soo 82, Nam Tae-hee 86) Myanmar 0
Lebanon 7 (Youssef Mohamad 27, Roda Antar 34, Hassan Chaito 36, 90+3, Ali Hamam 42, Hassan Maatouk 59, Joao Oumari 90) Laos 0
17/11/15
Laos 0 Korea Republic 5 (Ki Sung-yueng 3, 33, Song Heung-min 35, 67, Suk Hyun-jun 43)
24/03/16
Korea Republic 1 (Lee Jeong-hyeop 90+3) Lebanon 0
29/03/16
Lebanon 1 (Hilal Al Helwe 88) Myanmar 1 (Aung Thu 73)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Uzbekistan	8	7	0	1	20	7	13	21
DPR Korea	8	5	1	2	14	8	6	16
Philippines	8	3	1	4	8	12	-4	10
Bahrain	8	3	0	5	10	10	0	9
Yemen	8	1	0	7	2	17	-15	3

11/06/15
Yemen 0 DPR Korea 3
DPR Korea awarded 3-0 win due to Yemen fielding an ineligible player
Philippines 2 (Misagh Bahadoran 50, Javier Patino 59) Bahrain 1 (Abdulwahab Al Malood 90+3)
16/06/15
DPR Korea 4 (Pak Kwang-ryong 4, Jang Kuk-chol 16, Ro Hak-su 34, Ri Hyok-chol 36) Uzbekistan 2 (Anzur Ismailov 54, Sardor Rashidov 79)
Yemen 0 Philippines 2 (Misagh Bahadoran 52, Iain Ramsay 74)
03/09/15
Uzbekistan 1 (Alexander Geynrikh 51) Yemen 0
Bahrain 0 DPR Korea 1 (Jong Il-gwan 43)
08/09/15
Philippines 1 (Stephan Schrock 65) Uzbekistan 5 (Odil Akhmedov 1, Sardor Rashidov 14, 80, Igor Sergeev 43, 65)
Yemen 0 Bahrain 4 (Husain Mohamed 30, Sami Al Husaini 45, Abdulla Omar 66, Sayed Adnan 77)
08/10/15
DPR Korea 0 Philippines 0
Bahrain 0 Uzbekistan 4 (Igor Sergeev 52, Odil 56, Sardor Rashidov 66, Eldor Shomurodov 90+5)
13/10/15
DPR Korea 1 (Jong Il-gwan 12) Yemen 0
Bahrain 2 (Ismail Abdul-Latif 53, Sayed Adnan 61) Philippines 0
12/11/15
Philippines 0 Yemen 1 (Ahmed Al Sarori 83)
Uzbekistan 3 (Igor Sergeev 23, Alexander Geynrikh 65, Odil Akhmedov 87) DPR Korea 1 (Ri Hyok-chol 27)
17/11/15
DPR Korea 2 (Pak Kwang-ryong 45+1, Jong Il-gwan 90+3) Bahrain 0
Yemen 1 (Ahmed Al Sarori 90+2) Uzbekistan 3 (Azizbek Haydarov 7, Server Djeparov 31, Stanislav Andreev 50)
24/03/16
Uzbekistan 1 (Anzur Ismailov 59) Philippines 0
Bahrain 3 (Ismail Abdul-Latif 32, Abdulwahab Al Malood 63, Mohamed Al Romaihi 90+2) Yemen 0
29/03/16
Philippines 3 (Misagh Bahadoran 43, Manuel Ott 84, Iain Ramsay 90) DPR Korea 2 (So Kyong-jin 45+2, Ri Hyok-chol 48)
Uzbekistan 1 (Sardor Rashidov 50) Bahrain 0



Japan Claim U23 Crown In Dramatic Fashion

Substitute Takuma Asano came off the bench to score twice and earn Japan a dramatic 3-2 comeback win over Korea Republic in the final of the AFC U23 Championship at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha.

Kwon Chang-hoon and Jin Seong-uk had given Korea Republic a two-goal cushion by the second minute of the second half, but Asano's introduction in the 60th minute turned the game in Japan's favour with the Sanfrecce Hiroshima striker scoring either side of a goal by Shinya Yajima to seal the Japan fightback.

Japan and Korea Republic had already qualified for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro after advancing to the final, and the pair were joined by Iraq, who beat hosts Qatar in the third place play-off.

Japan had made the ideal start in Group B as Naomichi Ueda scored to secure a 1-0 win over DPR Korea before Makoto Teguramori's side became the first team to secure their place in the knockout phase as a late Yuya Kubo brace secured a 4-0 win over Thailand.

Japan then completed a 100% record to qualify for the quarter-finals as Group B winners after goals from Ryota Ohshima and

Yosuke Ideguchi secured a 2-1 win over Saudi Arabia, who missed out on a place in the last eight.

And it was instead DPR Korea who claimed second place courtesy of the greater number of goals scored after sharing a 2-2 draw with Thailand.

Korea Republic, meanwhile, began their campaign with a 2-1 win over Uzbekistan before Kwon Chang-hoon then scored a first half hat-trick to secure a 5-0 win over Yemen.

And despite a stoppage-time equaliser from Amjed Hussein earning Iraq a 1-1 draw with Korea Republic on the final Matchday, Shin Tae-yong's side still claimed top spot in Group C as both sides progressed to the quarter-finals.

The quarter-final line-up was then completed by Qatar and Iran from Group A and the United Arab Emirates and Jordan from Group D.

Qatar thrilled the home support in Doha by topping the table with a 100% record after recording wins over China, Iran and Syria.

Iran, meanwhile, beat Syria and China either side of their defeat by Qatar to claim second place.

In Group D, the UAE claimed top spot following a final day win over Vietnam, while Jordan held out to second place after sharing

a goalless draw with Australia.

Jordan's campaign, though, ended in the quarter-finals as Korea Republic recorded a 1-0 win to set up a semi-final meeting with tournament hosts Qatar.

Ali Asad scored the extra-time winner as Qatar edged out DPR Korea, who had struck a dramatic stoppage time equaliser at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Japan also needed extra-time to advance to the semi-finals as goals from Yuta Toyokawa and Shoya Nakajima secured a 3-0 win over Iran.

And Japan would face Iraq for a place in the final and automatic qualification for the Olympic Games after they claimed a 3-1 extra-time win over the UAE.

But it was Japan who advanced to the final of the AFC U23 Championship and secured qualification for the 2016 Olympic Games after snatching a dramatic 2-1 win over Iraq thanks to Riki Harakawa's 93rd-minute strike.

Japan were joined in the final by Korea Republic, who secured a 3-1 win over Qatar.

And Qatar missed out on qualification for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro after losing the third place play-off 2-1 to Iraq after extra-time.





Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Qatar	3	3	0	0	9	4	5	9
Iran	3	2	0	1	6	4	2	6
Syria	3	1	0	2	5	7	-2	3
China	3	0	0	3	4	9	-5	0

12/01/16

Syria 0 Iran 2 (Arsalan Motahhari 64, Milad Mohammadi 72)

Qatar 3 (Abdelkrim Hassan 65, 72, Ahmed Alaa 82)

China 1 (Liao Lisheng 43)

15/01/16

China 1 (Liao Lisheng 21) Syria 3 (Omar Kharbin 43, 53, Mahmood Al Baher 83)

Iran 1 (Ali Karim 90+1) Qatar 2 (Ahmed Alaa 35, Abdelkrim Hassan 56)

18/01/16

Qatar 4 (Abdelkrim Hassan 10, Ahmed Alaa 24, 82, Ali Moez 28) Syria 2 (Yousef Kala 4, Omar Kharbin 82)

Iran 3 (Arsalan Motahhari 38, Ehsan Pahlavan 40, Mahdi Torabi 48) China 2 (Chang Feiya 40, Liao Lisheng 70)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	3	3	0	0	7	1	6	9
DPR Korea	3	0	2	1	5	6	-1	2
Saudi Arabia	3	0	2	1	5	6	-1	2
Thailand	3	0	2	1	3	7	-4	2

13/01/16

Japan 1 (Naomichi Ueda 5) DPR Korea 0

Saudi Arabia (Mohamed Al Saiari 71) 1 Thailand 1 (Inpiit Pinyo 84)

16/01/16

Thailand 0 Japan 4 (Musashi Suzuki 27, Shinya Yajima 49, Yuya Kubo 75, 84)

DPR Korea 3 (Yun Il-gwang 52, Jang Kuk-chol 85)

Saudi Arabia 3 (Mohamed Kanno 40 Fahad Al Muwallad 62, Abdulrahman Al Ghamdi 69)

19/01/16

Saudi Arabia 1 (Abdullah Madu 57) Japan 2 (Ryota Oshima 32, Yosuke Ideguchi 53)

DPR Korea 2 (Kim Yong-il 17, Thossawat Limwanasa 45 OG) Thailand 2 (Marubadin Weerawatnodom 30, Chanathip Songkrasin 78)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Korea Republic	3	2	1	0	8	2	6	7
Iraq	3	2	1	0	6	3	3	7
Uzbekistan	3	1	0	2	6	6	0	3
Yemen	3	0	0	3	1	10	-9	0

13/01/16

Iraq 2 (Ali Faez 36, Ali Hisny 39) Yemen 0

Korea Republic 2 (Moon Chang-jin 20, 48)

Uzbekistan 1 (Dostonbek Khamdamov 57)

16/01/16

Yemen 0 Korea Republic 5 (Kwon Chang-hoon 14, 31, 41, Ryu Seung-woo 72, Kim Seung-jun 76)

Uzbekistan 2 (Dostonbek Khamdamov 1, Timur Khakimov 79) Iraq 3 (Mahdi Kamil 43, Ahmed Kadhim 38, Humam Tareq 84)

19/01/16

Iraq 1 (Amed Hussein 90+2) Korea Republic 1 (Kim Hyun 22)

Uzbekistan 3 (Javokhir Sakhibov 18, Igor Sergeev 68, Jaloliddin Masharipov 90+3) Yemen 1 (Salem Al Sarori 82)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
United Arab Emirates	3	2	1	0	4	2	2	7
Jordan	3	1	2	0	3	1	2	5
Australia	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	4
Vietnam	3	0	0	3	3	8	-5	0

14/01/16

Jordan 3 (Baba Faisal 38, 72, Omar Al Manasrah 68)

Vietnam 1 (Do Duy Manh 87)

Australia 0 United Arab Emirates 1 (Giancarlo Gallifuoco 86 OG)

17/01/16

Vietnam 0 Australia 2 (James Donachie 2, Jamie Maclaren 61)

United Arab Emirates 0 Jordan 0

20/01/16

Jordan 0 Australia 0

United Arab Emirates 3 (Pham Hoang Lam 65 OG, Mohamed Al Akberi 74, Ahmed Al Hashmi 78) Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Cong Phuong 24, Nguyen Tuan Anh 68)

Quarter-Finals

22/01/16

Japan 3 (Yuta Toyokawa 95, Shoya Nakajima 108, 110) Iran 0 AET

Qatar 2 (Akram Afif 6, Ali Asad 92) DPR Korea 1 (So Kyong-jin 90+1) AET

23/01/16

Korea Republic 1 (Moon Chang-jin 23) Jordan 0

United Arab Emirates 1 (Ali Mhawi 75 OG) Iraq 3 (Ali Hisny 77, Mohanad Abdulaheem 103, Ahmed Kadhim 120+3) AET

Semi-Finals

26/01/16

Japan 2 (Yuya Kubo 26, Riki Harakawa 90+3) Iraq 1 (Suad Natiq 43)

Qatar 1 (Ahmed Alaa 79) Korea Republic 3 (Ryu Seung-woo 48, Kwon Chang-hoon 89, Moon Chang-jin 90+5)

Third Place Play-off

29/01/16

Qatar 1 (Ahmed Alaa 27) Iraq 2 (Mohanad Abdulaheem 86, Aymen Hussein 109) AET

Final

30/01/16

Korea Republic 2 (Kwon Chang-hoon 20 Jin Seong-uk 47) Japan 3 (Shinya Yajima 68, Takuma Asano 66, 81)



Iran Edge Out Hosts To Claim Futsal Title

Iran claimed a record 11th AFC Futsal Championship as Ghodrat Bahadori and captain Mohammad Keshavarz scored to secure a 2-1 victory over hosts Uzbekistan in February's final in Tashkent.

Dilshod Irsaliev had given the hosts an early lead only for Bahadori to draw Mohammad Nazemalsharie's side level with an unstoppable shot from distance.

Keshavarz then tapped home six minutes before the interval, and despite both sides having chances in the second half, Iran claimed a first title 2010 following Japan's back-to-back successes in 2012 and 2014 having beaten Uzbekistan 8-3 in the final in Tashkent six years previously.

"For the past two tournaments we could not be champions because we were going through a generational change," said Iran coach Nazemalsharie.

"But we had great preparation, so we went into the tournament thinking we would be champions. We played well throughout, but I still think we can get better."

And with the competition's top five teams also qualifying for the 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup, both finalists along with Thailand, Vietnam and Australia will represent Asia in Colombia later this year.

Uzbekistan had earlier topped Group A on

maximum points to advance to the quarter-finals after successive wins over debutants Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon.

The hosts were joined in the last eight by Group A runners-up Kyrgyzstan, who crucially beat Saudi Arabia on Matchday Three.

Iran, meanwhile, stormed into the last eight with comprehensive wins over newcomers Jordan, China and Iraq after scoring 26 and conceding just two.

And Iraq beat China and Jordan to claim second place and their place in the quarter-finals.

In Group C, both Thailand and Vietnam ensured their quarter-final qualification with a game to spare after claiming six points from games with Tajikistan and Chinese Taipei.

But it was Thailand who topped the table after recording a 3-1 win over Vietnam.

And an almost identical scenario played out in Group D as Japan and Australia won their outings with Qatar and Malaysia to also advance with a game to spare.

And it was Japan who won their decider with Australia to advance as group winners.

Uzbekistan then secured their semi-final berth after a comfortable 3-0 quarter-final victory over Iraq, while Iran's dominant form continued after Nazemalsharie's side

recorded a 7-0 win over Kyrgyzstan.

Thailand also advanced with a 6-1 win over Australia, while Vietnam edged out defending champions Japan 2-1 on penalties following a thrilling 4-4 draw.

Those wins secured Uzbekistan, Iran, Thailand and Vietnam qualification for the 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup.

And the quartet were eventually joined by Australia, who beat Kyrgyzstan 3-1 in the fifth place play-off final.

Australia had earlier beat Iraq 5-3 in the semi-finals, while Kyrgyzstan recorded a 6-2 victory over Vietnam.

Uzbekistan then advanced to a fourth continental final with a 3-1 penalty shootout victory over Thailand after Artur Yunusov had struck two minutes from the end of extra-time to earn the hosts a 2-2 draw.

There was no such drama in the second semi-final, though, as four goals from Farhad Tavakoli and a treble from Mahdi Javid helped Iran to a comprehensive 13-1 win over Vietnam.

And the tournament's 14-goal top scorer Suphawut Thueanklang then netted four goals as Thailand beat Vietnam 8-0 to claim third place.

Iran's Ali Hassanzadeh was named the tournament's MVP.





Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Uzbekistan	3	3	0	0	9	3	6	9
Kyrgyzstan	3	1	1	1	8	8	0	4
Lebanon	3	0	2	1	7	9	-2	2
Saudi Arabia	3	0	1	2	7	11	-4	1

10/02/16

Lebanon 4 (Mohamad Kobeissy 23, 32, Ali Theich 24, Hassan Zeitoun 28) Kyrgyzstan 4 (Ruslan Ermekov 3, Ulanbek Baigazy 9, Maksadbek Alimov 25, 40) Uzbekistan 5 (Davron Choriev 17, 26, Jamoliddin Sharipov 25, Artur Yunusov 30, Konstantin Sviridov 33) Saudi Arabia 2 (Essam Sufyani 24, Hwehr Jmah 26)

12/02/16

Saudi Arabia 3 (Abdulaziz Al Alouni 13, Essam Sufyani 14, Aroan Nawaf 33) Lebanon 3 (Abdulaziz Al Alouni 2 OG, Ahmad Kheireldine 14, Ali Theich 24)

Kyrgyzstan 1 (Maksadbek Alimov 40) Uzbekistan 2 (Dilsho Rakhmatov 20, 23)

14/02/16

Uzbekistan 2 (Javlon Anorov 11, Farkhod Abdumavlyanov 16) Lebanon 0

Kyrgyzstan 3 (Rustam Ermekov 4, Ilias Chotbaev 16, Maksadbek Alimov 38) Saudi Arabia 2 (Essam Sufyani 1, Eihab Al Saad)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Iran	3	3	0	0	26	2	24	9
Iraq	3	2	0	1	12	17	-5	6
China	3	1	0	2	6	14	-8	3
Jordan	3	0	0	3	4	15	0	0

10/02/16

Iraq 6 (Waleed Khalid 13, 30, Hussein Al Zubaidi, Rafid Hameed 26, Said Abdulmalek 35, 38) China 1 (Wang Hongwei 19)

Iran 6 (Ali Hassanzadeh 2, 27, Hossein Tayebi 10, Ghodrat Bahadori 31, Mahdi Javid 34, 36) Jordan 0

12/02/16

China 0 Iran 7 (Mahammad Taheri 1, Ali Hassanzadeh 6, Hamid Ahmadi 17, Mohammad Keshavarz 26, 28, Hossein Tayebi 27, Ghodrat Bahadori 32)

Jordan 3 (Samer Samih 5, 29, Nooreddin Atef 26)

Iraq 4 (Waleed Khalid 21, Rafid Hameed 29, Salim Faisal 36, Firas Mohammed 37)

14/02/16

Iran 13 (Mohammad Taheri 1, 10, Hossein Tayebi 3, 11, 18, 28, Ali Hassanzadeh 5, 40, Mahdi Javid 6, 15, 34, Hamid Ahmadi 6, Farhad Tavakoli 20) Iraq 2 (Waleed Khalid 17, Amjad Kareem 17)

China 5 (Zeng Liang 25, He Yihui 31, Wang Hongwei 33, Zhao Liang 36, Li Jianjia 37) Jordan 1 (Mutaz Shaikha 39)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Thailand	3	3	0	0	15	7	8	9
Vietnam	3	2	0	1	14	8	6	6
Chinese Taipei	3	0	1	2	9	15	-6	1
Tajikistan	3	0	1	2	8	16	-8	1

11/02/16

Thailand 5 (Suphawut Thueanklang 7, 30, 32, Apiwat Chaemcharoen 25, Wiwat Thaijaruen 40) Tajikistan 4 (Nekruz Alimakhmadov 11, Mansur Mamedbabaev 21, Rahmonali Sharipov 35, 39)

Vietnam 5 (Nguyen Bao Quan 4 pen, Phung Trong Luan 6, Le Quoc Nam 28, Tran Long Vu 31, Ngo Ngoc Son 37) Chinese Taipei 4 (Lin Chih-hung 4, 31, Chi Sheng-fa 26, Huang Po-chun 39)

13/02/16

Chinese Taipei 2 (Chu Chia-wei 14, Lai Ming-hui 36) Thailand 7 (Suphawut Thueanklang 2, 33, Konghla Lakka 4, Chiang Chien-ying 22 OG, Jetsada Chudech 28, 37, Wiwat Thaijaruen 37)

Tajikistan 1 (Fayzali Sardorov 9) Vietnam 8 (Duong Anh Tung 1, 22, Tran Van Vu 14, 37, Nguyen Bao Quan 20, Le Quoc Nam 27, Tran Long Vu 34, Phung Trong Luan 35)

15/02/16

Thailand 3 (Suphawut Thueanklang 32, 40, 40)

Vietnam 1 (Vu Xuan Du 38)

Chinese Taipei 3 (Chu Chia-wei 26, Lin Chien-hsun 36, Chang Chien-ying 39) Tajikistan 3 (Nekruz Alimakhmadov 2, Shavqat Halimov 29, Mehruboni Tillozoda 40)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Japan	3	3	0	0	15	2	13	9
Australia	3	2	0	1	8	6	2	6
Qatar	3	1	0	2	8	8	0	3
Malaysia	3	0	0	3	4	19	-15	0

11/02/16

Japan 1 (Tomoaki Watanabe 16) Qatar 0

Australia 2 (Jarrod Basger 24, Gregory Giovenali 26)

Malaysia 1 (Khairul Effendy 19)

13/02/16

Malaysia 1 (Muhammad Afif 14) Japan 11 (Tomoki Yoshikawa 3, Manabu Takita 3, 7, Kaoru Morioka 13, Nobuya Osodo 13, Tomoaki Watanabe 15, Katsutoshi Henmi 15, Ryosuke Nishitani 16, 19, Kazuhiro Nibuya 19, Yuki Murota 40)

Qatar 2 (Hadi Jaber 3, Lucas Oliveira 27) Australia 5 (Daniel Fogarty 2, Gregory Giovenali 3, 26, Tobias Seeto 4, 37)

15/02/16

Japan 3 (Katsutoshi Henmi 8, Kaoru Morioka 19,

Kazuhiro Nibuya 34) Australia 1 (Gregory Giovenali 12)

Malaysia 2 (Akmalrulnizam Idris 2, Muhammad Afif

18) Qatar 6 (Mohamed Ali 2, Saad Bilal 5, Hadi Jaber 9,

26, Lucas Oliveira 39, 40)

Quarter-Finals

17/02/16

Uzbekistan 3 (Dilshod Rakhmatov 18, 39, Nodir Elibaev 31) Iraq 0

Thailand 6 (Jirawat Sornwichian 5, 39, Suphawut Thueanklang 10, 39, Jetsada Chudech 27, Wiwat Thaijaruen 33) Australia 1 (Gregory Giovenali 20)

Iran 7 (Hossein Tayebi 7, 15, 32, Mohammad Taheri 8, Ghodrat Bahadori 26, Ali Hassanzadeh 26, Mehran Alighadr 29) Kyrgyzstan 0

Japan 4 (Kazuhiro Nibuya 8, 26, Kaoru Morioka 13, 42) Vietnam 4 (Tran Van Vu 14, 39, Danh Phat 35, 49) Vietnam win 2-1 on penalties AET

Fifth Place Play-Offs

19/02/16

Iraq 3 (Mustafa Bachay 8, Said Abdulmalek 38, Salim Faisal 39)

Australia 5 (Jarrod Basger 6, 20, Daniel Fogarty 11, 37, Wade Giovenali 35)

Kyrgyzstan 6 (Ulanbek Baigazy 10, 30, Ilias Chotbaev 13, Maksadbek Alimov 24, 36, 40)

Japan 2 (Katsutoshi Henmi 26, Shota Hoshi 39)

19/02/16

Australia 3 (Daine Merrin 6, Grant Lynch 20, Gregory Giovenali 32) Kyrgyzstan 1 (Emil Kanetov 37)

Semi-Finals

21/02/16

Thailand 2 (Jetsada Chudech 24, Apiwat Chaemcharoen 41) Uzbekistan 2 (Dilshod Rakhmatov 23, Artur Yunusov 48)

Uzbekistan win 3-1 on penalties AET

Iran 13 (Mahdi Javid 2, 20, 32, Farhad Tavakoli 8, 8, 20, 22, Hamid Ahmadi 13, Hossein Tayebi 16, 27, Alireza Vafaei 26, Mohammad Keshavarz 37, 39) Vietnam 1 (Phung Trong Luan 17)

Third Place Play-off

21/02/16

Thailand 8 (Jetsada Chudech 6, Apiwat Chaemcharoen 11, 12, Suphawut Thueanklang 18 pen, 18 pen, 36, 40, Jirawat Sornwichian 34) Vietnam 0

Final

21/02/16

Uzbekistan 1 (Dilshod Irsaliev 6) Iran 2 (Ghodrat Bahadori 9, Mohammad Keshavarz 14)

Unbeaten Duo Secure Olympic Games Qualification



Australia and China both advanced to the 2016 Olympic Games after securing the top two places in AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016 in Osaka.

Alen Stajcic's Matildas won their first four games to guarantee Australia's second Olympic appearance, and first since 2004 in Athens, before a 1-1 with China secured top spot in the six-team table.

China had also secured their qualification for Brazil with a game to spare and the final day draw with Australia also completed an unbeaten campaign for Bruno Bini's side.

"I want to whole of Australia to realise just how big an achievement this is," said Stajcic following the 2-1 win over DPR Korea that confirmed their passage to the 12-team tournament in Brazil.

"The sheer courage, determination, heart and spirit of this team is something special. Our goal is not just to reach Rio, but to win a medal, and this is the first step towards reaching that target."

China, who were silver medalists at

the inaugural Women's Olympic Football tournament in 1996, claimed a fifth appearance at the Olympic Games having missed in 2012.

"The biggest thing was the result against DPR Korea," said coach Bini, whose side scored an stoppage time penalty against DPR Korea to secure a 1-1 draw on Matchday Two.

"If we hadn't have made it 1-1 at the end then then we maybe wouldn't have been able to win against Japan in the next game."

Lisa De Vanna, Michelle Heyman and Katrina Gorry were all on the scoresheet as Australia began the qualifying competition with a 3-1 win over hosts Japan.

China also won their tournament opener 2-0 against Vietnam with Gu Yasha scoring just before the hour and Zhang Rui adding a penalty shortly after.

DPR Korea and Korea Republic, meanwhile, played out a 1-1 draw in the third opening day fixture.

Captain Kyah Simon then scored a hat-trick on Matchday Two as the Matildas stormed to a 9-0 win over Vietnam to move to the top of the group.

China, though, needed a late penalty from substitute Wang Shuang to rescue a point in their 1-1 draw with DPR Korea.

Korea Republic and Japan, meanwhile, shared a 1-1 draw.

Stajcic's Australia then cemented their place at the top of the standings with a 2-0 victory over Korea Republic on Matchday Three thanks to Simon's early opener and Emily Van Egmond's penalty 16 minutes from time.

And Gu and Zhang scored as China edged out Japan 2-1 to leave the hosts still searching for a first win, while DPR Korea remained in the hunt for Olympic Games qualification with a 1-0 win over Vietnam.

China then made it three wins from four when Wang Shanshan scored just before half-time to claim a 1-0 win over Korea Republic.

But China's qualification for the Olympic Games was not confirmed until Australia later beat DPR Korea 2-1 as Gorry's late winner added to Heyman's opener as the Matildas also advanced to Brazil.

Hosts Japan, meanwhile, finally claimed their first win of a the competition with a 6-1 win over Vietnam.

Then in the final round of matches, Van Egmond netted late on to secure a 1-1 draw with China and top spot in the group after Ma Xiaoxu had opened the scoring on 16 minutes.

Japan recorded a second consecutive victory after recording a 1-0 victory against DPR Korea, while Korea Republic ended the campaign with a 4-0 win over Vietnam.



FINAL STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Australia	5	4	1	0	17	3	14	13
China	5	3	2	0	7	3	4	11
Japan	5	2	1	2	10	7	3	7
Korea Republic	5	1	2	2	6	5	1	5
DPR Korea	5	1	2	2	4	5	-1	5
Vietnam	5	0	0	5	1	22	-21	0

29/02/2016

China 2 (Gu Yasha 57, Zhang Rui 63 pen) Vietnam 0

DPR Korea 1 (Kim Un-ju 80) Korea Republic 1 (Jung Sul-bin 32)

Australia 3 (Lisa De Vanna 25, Michelle Heyman 41, Katrina Gorry 78) Japan 1 (Yuki Ogimi (45+2)

02/03/2016

Australia 9 (Emily Gielnik 10, Kyah Simon 17, 38, 43, Alanna Kennedy 19, Ashleigh Sykes 64, Emily Van Egmond 68,

Michelle Heyman 77, Clare Polkinghorne 85) Vietnam 0

DPR Korea 1 (Ra Un-sim 38) China 1 (Wang Shuang 90+3 pen)

Japan 1 (Mana Iwabuchi 84) Korea Republic 1 (Jung Sul-bin 87)

04/03/2016

Vietnam 0 DPR Korea 1 (Ju Hyo-sim 90)

Korea Republic 0 Australia 2 (Kyah Simon 1, Emily Van Egmond 74 pen)

Japan 1 (Kumi Yokoyama 65) China 2 (Zhang Rui 14, Gu Yasha 58)

07/03/2016

China 1 (Wang Shanshan 43) Korea Republic 0

DPR Korea 1 (Kim Su-gyeong 78) Australia 2 (Michelle Heyman 18, Katrina Gorry 84)

Vietnam 1 (Huynh Nhu 42 pen) Japan 6 (Mana Iwabuchi 39, Shinobu Ohno 45, Nahomi Kawasumi 80, Emi Nakajima 83, Kumi Yokoyama 90, Yuki Ogimi 90+3)

09/03/2016

Korea Republic 4 (Lim Seon-joo 8, 18, Lee Geum-min 69, Jeon Ga-eul 85) Vietnam 0

Australia 1 (Emily Van Egmond 85) China 1 (Ma Xiaoxu 16)

Japan 1 (Mana Iwabuchi 80) DPR Korea 0



Pair Lead The Way With Perfect Records

Korea Republic's FC Seoul and El Jaish of Qatar both posted perfect records in their opening three games of the AFC Champions League, while defending champions Guangzhou Evergrande were left still searching for their first win at the midway point of the group stage.

High-scoring FC Seoul opened up a three-point lead at the top of Group F by securing a 4-1 away win at China's Shandong Luneng on Matchday Three, as Adriano's brace made it nine goals in just three games for the Brazilian.

The sides had earlier claimed victories over Thai Premier League winners Buriram United and J.League champions Sanfrecce Hiroshima prior to the 2013 finalists' win in Jinan in March.

"The players have been extremely concentrated, and their attitude and spirit were perfect," said FC Seoul coach Choi Yong-soo following the win over Shandong.

"Our win was based on teamwork; I hope we can keep this status and repeat what we presented."

And El Jaish maintained their own 100% group stage record after a late goal from Uzbekistan forward Sardor Rashidov against his fellow countrymen Nasaf on Matchday Three secured a 1-0 win and left the Qatar Stars League side six points clear at the top of Group D.

And Qatar Stars League side El Jaish advanced to the Round of 16 in their only other appearance in 2013, and back-to-back 2-1 victories against inaugural champions Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates before the victory over Nasaf helped put Sabri Lamouchi's side move into a strong position to repeat that feat this year.

Nasaf, Al Ain and Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli were all six points adrift of the Qataris having picked up a win apiece from their opening fixtures.

"This is the third victory for us in the group and it will give us a big push to continue with the same momentum. Winning the first three matches is the perfect start," said El Jaish's French coach Lamouchi following the win over Nasaf.

Holders Guangzhou, meanwhile, endured a tough start to their campaign after failing to record a win in their opening three games in Group H.

Luiz Felipe Scolari's side conceded a last



minute equaliser in a 2-2 draw with Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds on Matchday Three having held a two goal advantage at half-time.

But after Sydney FC posted an away win at Pohang Steelers to leapfrog the K-League Classic side at the top of the standings, Guangzhou find themselves two points behind Pohang and Urawa at the halfway stage.

Fellow Chinese Super League sides Shanghai SIPG and Jiangsu FC, though, enjoyed significantly better starts.

After losing their opening encounter to Australia's Melbourne Victory, Shanghai defeated Korea Republic's Suwon Samsung Bluewings before Elkeson's brace against Gamba Osaka on Matchday Three ensured a 2-1 victory for Sven Goran Eriksson's team as they moved to the top of Group G.

Unbeaten Jiangsu, meanwhile, currently sit a point behind Group E leaders Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors having beaten the K-League side on Matchday Two.

But that win was sandwiched between draws with Becamex Binh Duong and FC Tokyo, while Jeonbuk recorded wins against the Vietnamese and Japanese sides.

Elsewhere in the West, Tractorsazi Tabriz suffered a 1-0 defeat at Pakhtakor on Matchday Three but still lead the way in Group C having seen off Al Jazira of the United Arab Emirates home and away in their opening two fixtures.

Pakhtakor's win, though, moved the Uzbekistan champions to within a point of two-time continental champions Al Hilal from Saudi Arabia, who drew 1-1 with Al Jazira.

Iran and Saudi Arabia also occupy the top two spots in Group B, with Al Nassr ahead of Zobahan on goal difference after the sides shared draws with Bunyodkor and Lekhwiya on Matchday Three.

Both teams have recorded a win and two draws in their opening three fixtures and sit three points ahead of Bunyodkor and Lekhwiya.

Finally, the UAE's Al Nasr lead the way in Group A having secured an impressive 2-1 away win at two-time winners Al Ittihad, while Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv followed up back-to-back draws against Al Ittihad with a 2-0 away victory at Sepahan.

Group Stage

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Al Nasr	3	2	0	1	4	3	1	6
Lokomotiv	3	1	2	0	4	2	2	5
Sepahan	3	1	0	2	2	4	-2	3
Al Ittihad	3	0	2	1	3	4	-1	2

23/02/16
Lokomotiv 1 (Sardor Mirzayev 89) Al Ittihad 1 (Gelmin Rivas 70)
Sepahan 2 (Luciano Pereira 14, 51) Al Nasr 0
01/03/16
Al Nasr 2 (Nilmar 57, Jonathan Pitroipa 90+3)
Sepahan 0
Al Ittihad 1 (Sulley Muntari 14) Lokomotiv 1 (Temurkhuja Abdukholikov 80)
15/03/16
Sepahan 0 Lokomotiv 2 (Marat Bikmaev 14, Sardor Mirzayev 86)
Al Ittihad 1 (Gelmin Rivas 13) Al Nasr 2 (Nilmar 2, 74)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Al Nassr	3	1	2	0	5	4	1	5
Zobahan	3	1	2	0	1	0	1	5
Bunyodkor	3	0	2	1	3	4	-1	2
Lekhwiya	3	0	2	1	1	2	-1	2

23/02/16
Lekhwiya 0 Zobahan 1 (Mahdi Rajabzadeh 46)
Al Nassr 3 (Adrian Mierzejewski 45+1, Yahya Al Shehri 79, Hussain Sulaimani 85) Bunyodkor 3 (Dostonbek Khamdamov 3, 76, Chaker Zouaghi 33)
01/03/16
Bunyodkor 0 Al Nassr 1 (Modibo Maiga 36)
Zobahan 0 Lekhwiya 0
16/03/16
Bunyodkor 0 Zobahan 0
Al Nassr 1 (Ibrahim Ghaleb 88) Lekhwiya 1 (Dioko Kaluyituka 7)

Group C

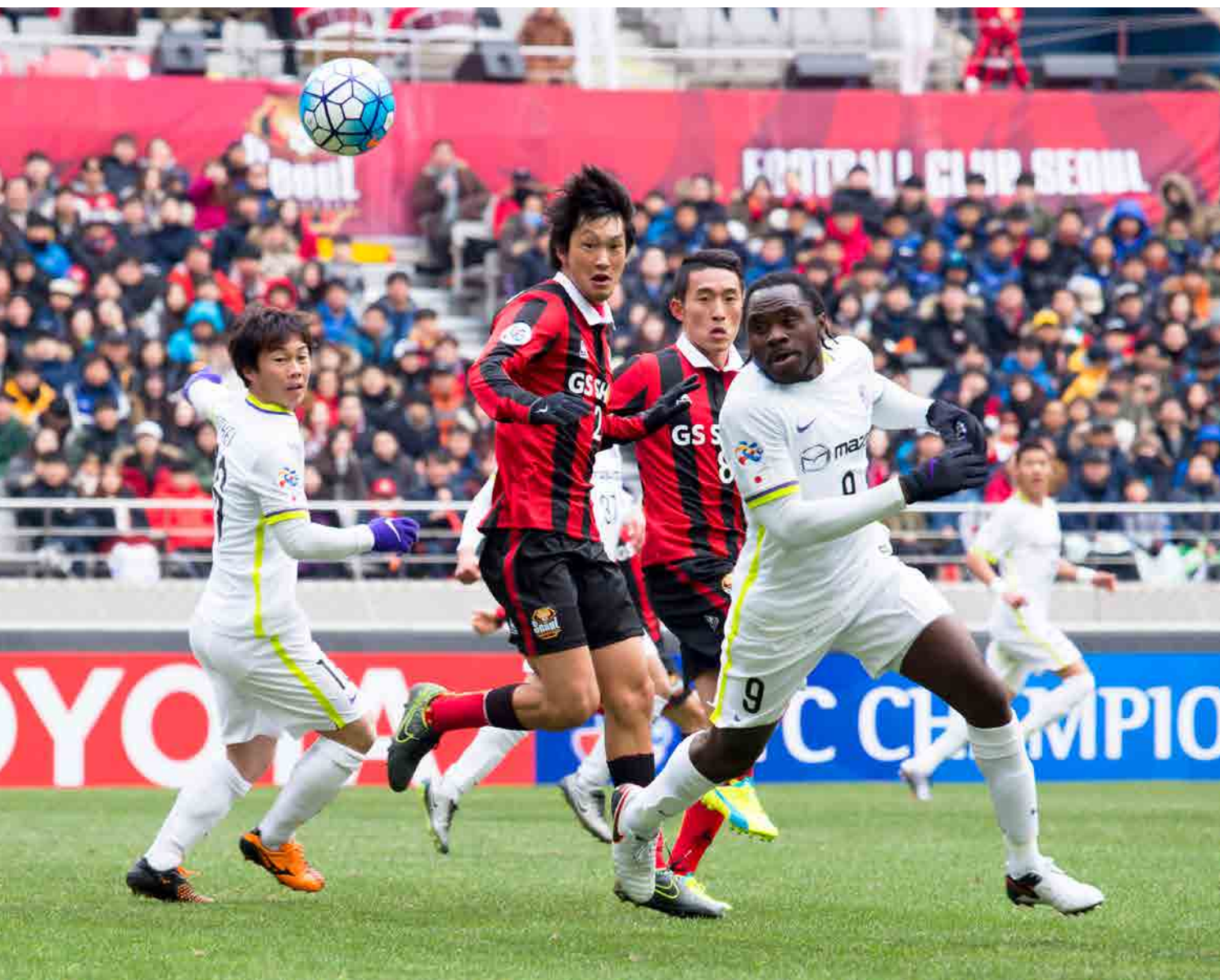
	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Tractorsazi Tabriz	3	2	0	1	5	1	4	6
Al Hilal	3	1	2	0	7	4	3	5
Pakhtakor	3	1	1	1	4	6	-2	4
Al Jazira	3	0	1	2	1	6	-5	1

24/02/16
Pakhtakor 2 (Igor Sergeev 70, Davronbek Khashimov 89) Al Hilal (Yasser Al Qahtani 60, Yousef Al Salem 84)
Tractorsazi Tabriz 4 (Bakhtiar Rahmani 4, 60, Shojae Iranpourian 10, Mehdi Sharifi 54) Al Jazira 0
02/03/16
Al Jazira 0 Tractorsazi Tabriz 1 (Bakhtiar Rahmani 31)
Al Hilal 4 (Khalid Kaabi 61, 78, Abdulla Al Dossary 55, Adnan Orakovic 58 OG) Pakhtakor 1 (Igor Sergeev 31)
15/03/15
Pakhtakor 1 (Igor Sergeev 41) Tractorsazi Tabriz 1
Al Jazira 1 (Fares Juma 90+4) Al Hilal 1 (Ailton 9)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
El Jaish	3	3	0	0	5	2	3	9
Al Ain	3	1	0	2	3	4	-1	3
Nasaf	3	1	0	2	3	4	-1	3
Al Ahli	3	1	0	2	3	4	-1	3

24/02/16
Al Ain 1 (Douglas 65) El Jaish 2 (Hamed Abderrazzaq 9, Romarinho 45)
Al Ahli 2 (Mohammed Al Fatil 2, Omar Al Soma 47)
Nasaf 1 (Bobir Abdixolikov 29)
02/03/16
Nasaf 2 (Bobir Abdixolikov 47, Maksud Karimov 60)
Al Ahli 1 (Muhammad Radiyah 71)
El Jaish 2 (Abderrazzaq Hamedallah 49, Yasin Isa 79)
Al Ain 1 (Saeed Al Katheeri 86)
16/03/16
Al Ain 1 (Omar Abdulrahman 71) Al Ahli 0
El Jaish 1 (Sardor Rashidov 87) Nasaf 0



Group Stage

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Jeonbuk	3	2	0	1	6	4	2	6
Jiangsu FC	3	1	2	0	4	3	1	5
FC Tokyo	3	1	1	1	4	3	1	4
Binh Duong	3	0	1	2	2	6	-4	1

23/02/16
 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Go Moo-yul 39, Lee Dong-gook 83) FC Tokyo 1 (Takuma Abe 87)
 Becamex Binh Duong 1 (Nguyen Anh Duc 28)
 Jiangsu FC (Ji Xiang 13)
 01/03/16
 FC Tokyo 3 (Nathan Burns 50, Bui Tan Truong 67 OG, Ryoichi Maeda 84) Becamex Binh Duong 1 (Nguyen Anh Duc 24)
 Jiangsu FC 3 (Alex Teixeira 16, Jo 65, Wu Xi 69)
 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Goo Moo-yul 62, Trent Sainsbury 86OG)
 15/03/16
 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 2 (Ricardo Lopes 41, Lee Dong-gook 90) Becamex Binh Duong 0
 FC Tokyo 0 Jiangsu FC 0

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
FC Seoul	3	3	0	0	14	2	12	9
Shandong	3	2	0	1	6	5	1	6
Sanfrecce	3	1	0	2	5	6	-1	3
Buriram United	3	0	0	3	0	12	-12	0

23/02/16
 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 1 (Kohei Shimizu 64)
 Shandong Luneng 2 (Yang Xu 67, Diego Tardelli 78)
 Buriram United 0 FC Seoul 6 (Adriano 28, 40, 50, 60, Dejan Damjanovic 67, Lee Seok-hyun 90)
 01/03/16
 FC Seoul 4 (Kim Won-sik 31, Adriano 49, 56, 69)
 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 1 (Kazuhiko Chiba 25)
 Shandong Luneng 3 (Diego Tardelli 65, Jucilei 81, Zhao Mingjian 86) Buriram United 0
 16/03/16
 Shandong Luneng 1 (Jucilei 62) FC Seoul (Adriano 28, 71, Go Yo-han 65, Dejan Damjanovic 65)
 Sanfrecce Hiroshima 3 (Takuma Asano 42, 55, Kohei Shimizu 81)

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Shanghai SIPG	3	2	0	1	5	4	1	6
Melbourne Victory	3	1	2	0	3	2	1	5
Gamba Osaka	3	0	2	1	2	3	-1	2
Suwon	3	0	2	1	1	2	-1	2

24/02/16
 Melbourne Victory 2 (Jai Ingham 31, Besart Berisha 73) Shanghai SIPG 1 (Wu Lei 52)
 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 0 Gamba Osaka 0
 02/03/16
 Gamba Osaka 1 (Yasuhiro Endo 57) Melbourne Victory 1 (Nicholas Ansell 3)
 Shanghai SIPG 2 (Elkeson 32, Wu Lei 52) Suwon Samsung Bluewings 1 (Jang Hyun-soo 72)
 15/03/16
 Melbourne Victory 0 Suwon Samsung Bluewings 0
 Shanghai SIPG 2 (Elkeson 41, 62) Gamba Osaka 1 (Patric 60)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Sydney FC	3	2	0	1	3	3	0	6
Pohang Steelers	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	4
Urawa	3	1	1	1	4	3	1	4
Guangzhou	3	0	2	1	3	4	-1	2

24/02/16
 Urawa Red Diamonds 2 (Yuki Moto 8, Shinzoh Kohrogi 65) Sydney FC 0
 Guangzhou Evergrande 0 Pohang Steelers 0
 02/03/16
 Sydney FC 2 (Robert Stambolziev 18, Milos Dimitrijevic 89) Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Aaron Clever 25 OG)
 Pohang Steelers 1 (Son Jun-ho 19) Urawa Red Diamonds 0
 16/03/15
 Pohang Steelers 0 Sydney FC 1 (Chris Naumoff 41)
 Guangzhou Evergrande 2 (Ricardo Goulart 6, 14)
 Urawa Red Diamonds 2 (Yuki Muto 30, Shinzo Koroki 89)



Defending Champions Johor Set The Pace

Defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim, India's Mohun Bagan and former winners Al Muharraq of Bahrain showcased their early AFC Cup credentials as the three sides posted 100% records at the halfway point of the group stage.

Malaysia Super League winners Johor opened up a six-point lead in Group H after their 3-0 defeat of Lao Toyota on Matchday Three followed wins over Myanmar's Ayeyawady United and JSW Bengaluru of India, while 2015 AFC Cup MVP Safiq Rahim netted six goals to top the scoring charts after three games.

Ayeyawady, Bengaluru and Lao are all on three points having picked up a win each.

"It was not an easy first half for us as we moved the ball too slowly sometimes," said Johor coach Mario Gomez after the win over Lao.

"But the most important thing for us is to win. It doesn't matter what the final score is, so long as we win."

I-League champions Mohun Bagan, meanwhile, secured a hard-fought 3-2 win against Myanmar's Yangon United to stretch their lead at the top of Group G to five points having earlier beaten Maziya Sports & Recreation of the Maldives and Hong Kong's South China.

Yangon occupy second place on goal difference ahead of Maziya, who recorded a 2-1 win over South China.

"The wins are in the past and now we have to look to play the remaining matches," said Mohun Bagan coach Sanjoy Sen, whose side's last appearance in the AFC Cup saw them eliminated in the group stage after six

successive defeats in 2009.

"We have three matches left and you must remember two of them are also away ties."

Al Muharraq, meanwhile, maintained their 100% record after the 2008 champions beat Syria's Al Jaish 1-0 to follow up victories over Palestine's Ahli Al Khalil and Fanja of Oman.

Ahli Al Khalil moved above Al Jaish into third place on goals scored following their 2-1 win over Fanja.

"Our players were not at their best; however, the most important thing is we got the three points and we remain top of the group," said Al Muharraq coach Isa Al Hamdani after the win



over Al Jaish.

Elsewhere, Philippines duo Kaya FC and Ceres La Salle made positive starts to their maiden AFC Cup campaigns.

Kaya moved to the top of Group F after a 1-0 victory over Singapore's Balestier Khalsa having earlier secured their first ever points in the competition by beating Maldives champions New Radiant on Matchday Two after losing their group opener to Hong Kong's Kitchee.

"We played excellent football," said Kaya

coach Joel Villarino. "We were able to rotate the ball. We defended well and controlled midfield. We played with direction. What's good is that being first timers in the competition, we are still growing as a team."

Balestier and Kitchee lead the way in the battle for second on four points, while New Radiant remained in contention having picked up draws against both teams.

Philippines champions Ceres, meanwhile, remained unbeaten but two points adrift of Group E pacesetters Tampines Rovers after the sides shared a 1-1 draw in Singapore on Matchday Three.

Malaysia's Selangor FA sit a point behind Ceres, while debutants Lt. Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club of Bangladesh suffered three defeats.

Iraq's Nafit Al Wasat lead the way in Group B after their 2-0 win over 2015 runners-up FC Istiklol of Tajikistan moved them above Al Faisaly following the Jordanians' 1-1 draw with Tripoli Club of Lebanon.

After a fine debut performance last year, though, Istiklol have endured a disappointing start to their campaign after claiming just a single point.

Another Iraqi side, Air Force Club, led the way in Group C after winning their opening two encounters against Palestine's Al Dharia and Al Orouba of Oman but then saw their 100% record dashed when four goals by Al Wahda's Reja Rafe helped Syria's Al Wahda to a 5-2 win on Matchday Three.

Finally, Lebanon's Al Ahed sit top of Group A thanks to a 5-2 away win against Al Hidd of Bahrain, while unbeaten debutants Altyn Asyr of Turkmenistan sit second after their 1-1 draw with Jordan's Al Wehdatt.

Group Stage

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Al Ahed	3	2	0	1	8	6	2	6
Altyn Asyr	3	1	2	0	4	2	2	5
Al Wehdatt	3	1	1	1	5	4	1	4
Al Hidd	3	0	1	2	3	8	-5	1

23/02/16

Altyn Asyr 2 (Nour Mansour 57 OG, Amir Gurbani 74) Al Ahed 0

Al Wehdatt 2 (Francisco Torres 35, Ahmad Abukbeer 55) Al Hidd 0

08/03/16

Al Ahed 3 (Mouhamadou Drame 31, Ahmad Zreik 74, Nour Mansour 88 pen) Al Wehdatt 2 (Francisco Torres 36, Baha Faisal 85)

Al Hidd 1 (Ali Haram 78) Altyn Asyr 1 (Serdar Geldiyev 69)

15/03/16

Al Wehdatt 1 (Francisco Torres 15) Altyn Asyr 1 (Amir Gurbani 2)

Al Hidd 2 (Mohammad Al Daoud 52, Ahmed Al Khattal 59) Al Ahed 5 (Hassan Chaito 4, Ahmad Zreik 16, Mouhamadou Drame 61, 74, Denis Iguma 85)

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Nafit Al Wasat	3	2	0	1	4	2	2	6
Al Faisaly	3	1	2	0	3	2	1	5
Tripoli Club	3	1	1	1	3	3	0	4
FC Istiklol	3	0	1	2	1	4	-3	1

23/02/16

FC Istiklol 0 Al Faisaly 0

Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Amjed Waleed 90+2) Tripoli Club 0

08/03/16

Al Faisaly 2 (Yaseen Al Bakheet 55, Salem Al Ajalin 78) Nafit Al Wasat 1 (Amjed Waleed 90)

Tripoli Club 2 (Abdul Aziz 58, Walid Fattouh 87) FC Istiklol 1 (Oleksandr Kablash 55)

15/03/16

Nafit Al Wasat 2 (Jasim Mohammed 45+1 Mardek Mardkian 71) FC Istiklol 0

Tripoli Club 1 (Abou Al Mel 45) Al Faisaly 1 (Maher Al Jada 84)

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Air Force Club	3	2	0	1	6	6	0	6
Al Orouba	3	1	1	1	4	4	0	4
Al Wahda	2	1	0	1	6	4	2	3
Al Dharia	2	0	1	1	1	3	-2	1

24/02/16

Al Dharia 0 Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 12, 41)

Al Orouba 2 (Abdulwasea Al Matari 54, Mohammed Al Lawati 89) Al Wahda 1 (Reja Rafe 88)

09/03/16

Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 14, Samal Saeedi 66) Al Orouba 1 (Moussa Kone 77)

16/03/16

Al Wahda 5 (Reja Rafe 10, 32, 55, 56, Osama Omari 63) Air Force Club 2 (Hammedi Ahmed 59, 80 pen)

Al Orouba 1 (Moatsem Al Shibli 67) Al Dharia 1 (Abdhalim Morjan 1)

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Al Muharraq	3	3	0	0	5	2	3	9
Ahli Al Khalil	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
Al Jaish	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	3
Fanja	3	0	0	3	2	5	-3	0

24/02/16

Al Jaish 1 (Yousef Kalfa 78) Fanja 0

Al Muharraq 2 (Fahad Showaiter 5, Ismael Hasan 23 pen) Ahli Al Khalil 1 (Mahmoud Wadi 15)

09/03/16

Fanja 1 (Imad Al Hosni 30) Al Muharraq 2 (Jamal Rashed 21, Elias 73)

16/03/16

Ahli Al Khalil 2 (Mahmoud Wadi 24, 65) Fanja 1 (Abdulaziz Al Maqbali 90+2)

Al Muharraq 1 (Ismael Hasan 29) Al Jaish 0



Group Stage

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Tampines Rovers	3	2	1	0	6	1	5	7
Ceres La Salle	3	1	2	0	5	3	2	5
Selangor FA	3	1	1	1	6	6	0	4
Lt. Sheikh Jamal	3	0	0	3	3	10	-7	0

23/02/16

Ceres La Salle 2 (Stephan Schrock 18, Adrian Gallardo 87) Selangor FA 2 (Mauro Olivi 34, Mohamad Kamal 60)

Tampines Rovers 4 (Billy Mehmet 2, Hafiz Sujad 33, Afiz Yunus 52, Topu Barman 54 OG) Lt. Sheikh Jamal 0

08/03/16
Lt. Sheikh Jamal 0 Ceres La Salle 2 (Adrian Gallardo 25, 29)

Selangor FA 0 Tampines Rovers 1 (Fazrul Nawaz 26)

15/03/16
Tampines Rovers 1 (Hafiz Sujad 69) Ceres La Salle (Adrian Gallardo 88)

Lt. Sheikh Jamal 3 (Landing Darboe 29, Emeka Onuoha 65, Wedson Anselme 66) Selangor FA 4 (Patrick Wleh 39, Gopinathan Ramachandra 53, Mauro Olivi 70, 83)

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Kaya FC	3	2	0	1	2	1	1	6
Balestier Khalsa	3	1	1	1	3	3	0	4
Kitchee	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	4
New Radiant	3	0	2	1	2	3	-1	2

23/02/16

New Radiant 2 (Izzath Baree 50, Waheed Rilwan 90+3) Balestier Khalsa 2 (Muhammad Fazli 36, Muhammad Fadhil Noh 69)

Kitchee 1 (Rufino Segovia 69 pen) Kaya FC 0

08/03/16
Kaya FC 1 (Jose Porteria 90+4) New Radiant 0
Balestier Khalsa 1 (Zulkifli Hassim 31) Kitchee 0

15/03/16
Kaya FC 1 (Antonio Ugarte 48) Balestier Khalsa 0

Kitchee 0 New Radiant 0

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Mohun Bagan	3	3	0	0	12	4	8	9
Yangon United	3	1	1	1	5	5	0	4
Maziya	3	1	1	1	5	7	-2	4
South China	3	0	0	3	2	8	-6	0

24/02/16

Yangon United 2 (Kyaw Ko Ko 19, Marcelo Fernandes 48) South China 1 (Ryan Griffiths 15 pen)

Mohun Bagan 5 (Sony Norde 19, Jeje Lalpekhlu 33, 69, Cornell Glen 35, 72) Maziya 2 (Imaaz Ahmed 61, Raju Gaikwad 77 OG)

09/03/16
Maziya 1 (Ahmed Rasheed 64) Yangon United 1 (Kyaw Ko Ko 87)

South China 0 Mohun Bagan 4 (Lenny Rodrigues 15, Sony Norde 39, Cornell Glen 44, Jeje Lalpekhlu 83)

16/03/16
Maziya (Ahmed Rasheed 51 Cheung Kin Fung 68 OG)

South China 1 (Chan Siu Kwan 36)

Mohun Bagan 3 (Sony Norde 10, Jeje Lalpekhlu 21, 66) Yangon United (Marcelo Fernandes 34 pen, 64)

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
Johor Darul Ta'zim	3	3	0	0	12	1	11	9
Ayeyawady United	3	1	0	2	5	11	-6	3
JSW Bengaluru	3	1	0	2	2	3	-1	3
Lao Toyota	3	1	0	2	4	8	-4	3

Lao Toyota 2 (Kazuo Homma 2, Phatthana Syvilay 34)

JSW Bengaluru 1 (Chekiyot Kizhakkeveetil Vineeth 90)

Johor Darul Ta'zim 8 (Safiq Rahim 5, 49, 63, Pereyra Diaz 14, Marcos Antonio 31, Juan Martin Lucero 82, 87, Aidil Zafuan 89) Ayeyawady United 1 (Thiha Zaw 7)

09/03/16
Ayeyawady United 4 (Christopher Iyikwobe 22, 32, 55, Aung Kyaw Naing 78) Lao Toyota 2 (Sitthideth Khanthavong 64, 89)

JSW Bengaluru 0 Johor Darul Ta'zim 1 (Safiq Rahim 55)

16/03/16
Ayeyawady United 0 JSW Bengaluru 1 (Sunil Chhetri 34)

Johor Darul Ta'zim 3 (Safiq Rahim 62 pen 74 pen, Amri Yahyah 90+2) Lao Toyota 0

AFC Extends Sportradar Partnership

The AFC signed a new, extended partnership agreement with Sportradar in Doha in January to significantly strengthen the fight against match-fixing in Asia.

Through this new agreement the AFC has positioned itself as one of the most committed sport bodies in the world on the issue of match-fixing.

"The integrity of sport is not negotiable. It is a crucial cornerstone to protecting the sport for future generations," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"At the AFC we are not content to just address this key area. We want to do everything we can to protect Asian football, to protect football in each country in Asia and to lead by example.

"Sportradar has proven to be a valuable partner in that objective and in our vision. With this new partnership, we have taken the best the organisation has to offer and extended it to each of our Member Associations."

The AFC's partnership with Sportradar, a global leader

in betting fraud prevention, detection and intelligence, was extended for a further two years.

Cooperation between the two organisations started in 2013 and the new agreement will cover over 4,500 matches across Asia each year through the specifically developed AFC Monitoring System (AMS).

This coverage will include all AFC competitions and the top professional leagues in each of the AFC's Member Associations.

In addition, prominent continental and regional tournaments will also be monitored by the system.

In parallel with these monitoring and detection solutions, Sportradar will also develop an integrity mobile application for the AFC which can be used to report match-fixing cases.

It will also support the AFC in the development of its integrity workshops and provide bespoke intelligence and research into match-fixing operations.

A senior expert from Sportradar will also be joining the AFC to provide exclusive and ongoing support to the AFC Integrity Unit.



Miyama Receives AFC Women's Player Of The Year Award

Aya Miyama was presented with the 2015 AFC Women's Player of the Year Award in Osaka in March during the AFC Women's Olympic Football Tournament Rio 2016 qualifiers.

Miyama was named AFC Women's Player of the Year for a third time having previously won the accolade in both 2011 and 2012.

The Women's AFC Youth Player of the Year Award was also presented to Japan's Rikako Kobayashi, while the AFC Fair Play Association of the Year accolade was also received by the Japan Football Association.

"Women's football has enormous global growth potential. The women's game in Asia is world class and Japan has an enviable track record, with star players such as Aya Miyama," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"As the 2015 AFC Annual Awards showed again, efforts by the Japan Football Association are paying off across the board, as the JFA came first in various

categories. I would like to congratulate the JFA for their exemplary success and hope other Member Associations will be able to learn from it."



AFC Unites Under 'One Asia, One Goal'

The AFC Executive Committee reiterated its long-term objectives to become the world's leading football Confederation and of football becoming the continent's number one sport at its meeting in Kuala Lumpur in March.

United behind the sentiment of 'One Asia, One Goal', the AFC Executive Committee also pledged to further strengthen ties with other football bodies.

"Our stated ambition is to increase engagement with the billions of potential football fans across this continent, as well as becoming the world's leading Confederation," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al

Khalifa.

"The AFC will continue to work closely with other Confederations – strengthening our links with CAF, CONCACAF, UEFA and OFC as well as building on the understanding we have with other key stakeholders.

"We must work harder than ever at the AFC to sustain the momentum Asian football is gathering on the global stage. However, we need, as we said in the Vision and Mission, to make our teams stronger so we can close the gap on world football powerhouses.

"That must be our focus in the coming months and years."



Grassroots Awards Winners Honoured

Representatives from Japan, Vietnam and Brunei Darussalam collected their AFC President Recognition Award for Grassroots Football 2015 in Kuala Lumpur in March.

The awards, which were originally announced during the AFC's Annual Awards in New Delhi, India last November, are based on a points system which takes into account several criteria such as the structure and management of grassroots football as well as the philosophy and policy of Member Associations.

In addition, Member Associations' grassroots partnerships with various external organisations are also assessed, as are technical programmes such as courses, workshops and talent identification.

Other criteria include exchange programmes - such as those with schools - administrative sub-regional football associations, communities and clubs as well as grassroots activities, for example promotional, educational and social responsibility events.

National Football Association of Brunei Darussalam

President HRH Prince Sufri Bolkiah collected the award for the Aspiring Category, Vietnam Football Federation General Secretary Le Hoai Anh for the Developing Category and Masao Nakayama, Member of the Japan Football Association's Kids Project, for the Inspiring Category.



AFC Celebrates Women's Football Day

Women and girls across Asia marked the annual AFC Women's Football Day in March.

This year 29 Member Associations, from Bhutan to Guam, from Iran and from Singapore to the United Arab Emirates marked AFC Women's Football Day with festivals, tournaments, workshops, skills clinics and seminars involving children, adults, veterans, professional footballers, Non-Governmental Organisations and ministers.

"We are proud of our women's football record in Asia: five of the world's top 20 women's football teams are Asian and the numbers of women and girls taking up football keep growing," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

"Running football on the world's most populous continent, the AFC has for a long time understood the

huge growth potential women's football has."

AFC Women's Football Day coincides with International Women's Day and took place on 8 March.

"There's plenty of success to celebrate this AFC Women's Football Day. Our five teams in the FIFA Women's World Cup all did well, and the Olympic qualifying tournament in Osaka shows the quality that is continuing to develop in Asia," said AFC Executive Committee Member and Chairwoman of the AFC Women's Football Committee Moya Dodd.

"The passage of the reforms through the FIFA Congress will also give new impetus to women in football, with Asia to be given its own women's seat on the new FIFA Council, and the development of the women's game and the inclusion of women in football governance being elevated to FIFA statutory objectives."

AFC Holds Inaugural Grassroots Conference

The AFC's commitment to develop grassroots football in Asia was underlined as the first-ever AFC Grassroots Conference took place in Kuala Lumpur in March.

The theme of the conference - Grassroots Football in Asia: The Way Forward – was designed to equip Asia's grassroots managers with the industry's best practices and widen their capabilities to implement robust grassroots systems in their respective countries.

Featuring some of grassroots' most established specialists, which included grassroots expert Robin Russell, German Football Association's Willi Hink, the Indian Super League's Grassroots Director Piet Hubers and Grassroots Adviser in China and Japan Tom Byer, the conference reinforced AFC's vision to ensure that football remains the most popular sport in Asia.

"The purpose of the grassroots game is to have mass participation, providing opportunities for all. Building a strong base through the grassroots is necessary for the game to flourish across the continent," said AFC Technical Director

Andy Roxburgh.

The AFC Grassroots Charter was presented to participants to encourage Member Associations to further develop their programmes and aspire towards the AFC's benchmark, with the AFC defining grassroots as 'all football which is non-professional and non-elite'.

Participants were also provided case studies highlighting the benefits of the grassroots game as a powerful platform to promote positive values, education, health, community and social development, through football.

"The new Charter is most useful as it creates a step-by-step approach to grow our game progressively. It gives us the motivation to continuously improve and learn from each other's strengths," said Grassroots Manager from the Football Federation of Turkmenistan

Charymurat Kurbanov.

"This conference is an excellent platform to share ideas, to understand what works, areas to improve and good implementation practices first-hand from some of the most renowned grassroots experts."



Futsal Development Team Visits The Philippines



An AFC Futsal Development team concluded its assessment visit to the Philippines in January.

The three-day assignment was aimed at developing the sport in the ASEAN country.

"This futsal assessment visit is really needed as it will help the PFF find a new direction to promote the game and futsal also plays an important part in football development," said General Secretary of the Philippine Football Federation (PFF) Atty. Edwin B. Gastanes.

"Futsal is a new sport in Asia and it has been growing in the past 15 years. Most importantly is the direction of the PFF towards the development of futsal in this country

and we are willing to work closely with the AFC Futsal and Beach Soccer Development team."

The AFC team conducted various meetings, field visits and inspections during the assessment visit.

"Futsal is the key to creating talented and skillful players for football," said Head of AFC Futsal and Beach Soccer Development Ali Targholizade.

"Some countries are good at football because of futsal and some countries maybe can't achieve in football but can do so in futsal.

"I'd like to thank the PFF for their full cooperation and hospitality given."

AFC Awards To Take Place In Abu Dhabi

The 2016 AFC Annual Awards ceremony will be held in Abu Dhabi in November.

The decision to name the capital of the United Arab Emirates as the host was ratified during the AFC's Executive Committee meeting in Kuala Lumpur in March.

Abu Dhabi previously hosted the AFC Annual Awards in 2006.

"Football has grown enormously in the UAE over the years and we are very pleased to hold the Annual Awards in Abu Dhabi this year," said AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa.

The 2015 AFC Annual Awards were held in India's capital, New Delhi.



Tianhe Sport Center Stadium

Guangzhou, China

Guangzhou Evergrande's multi-purpose Tianhe Sport Center Stadium is situated in the heart of the Southern Chinese city and has a capacity of just under 60,000.

Opened in 1987 for that year's National Games of China, Tianhe Sport Center

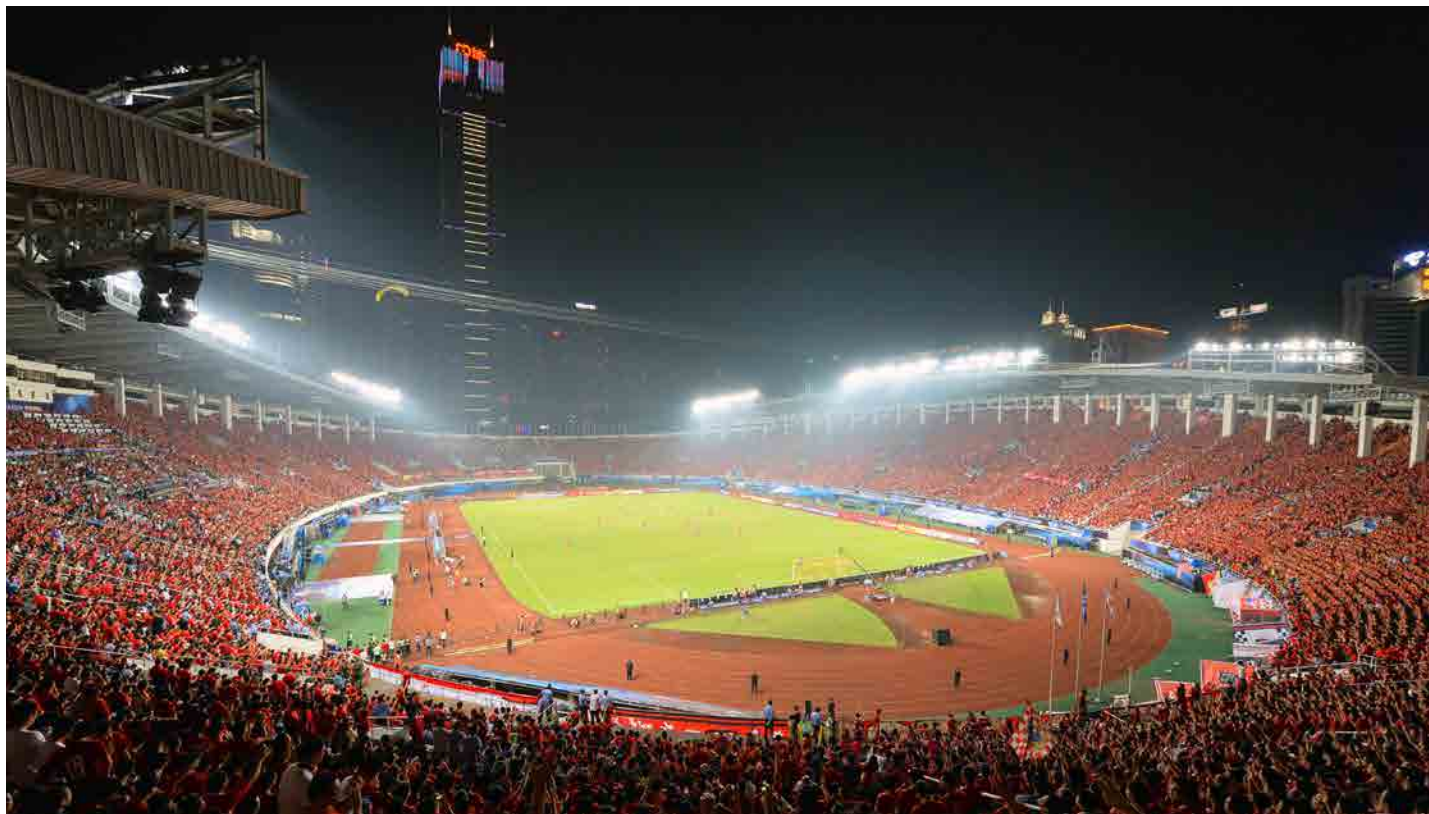
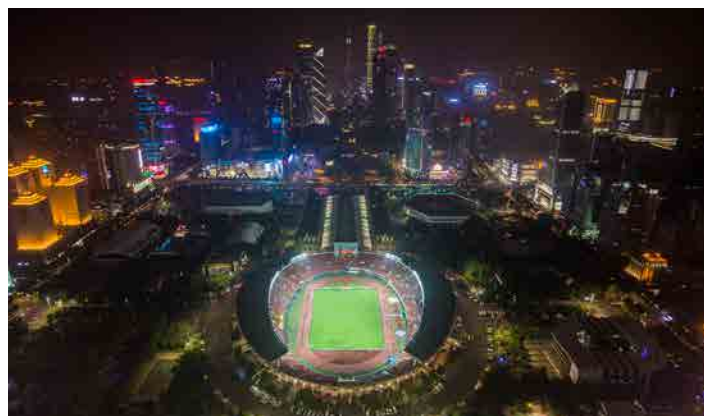
Stadium hosted matches at the inaugural FIFA Women's World Cup, including China's quarter-final with Sweden.

And in 2010, Tianhe Sport Center Stadium was the main venue for the Asian Games and hosted the finals of both the men's and women's football tournaments.

Most recently, the venue has become known as the home of two-time AFC Champions League winners Guangzhou.

Tianhe Sport Center Stadium attracted a crowd of 55,847 for the second leg of the AFC Champions League final as Guangzhou claimed a 1-1 draw against FC Seoul of the Korea Republic to win the title on away goals.

And in 2015, 42,499 spectators watched as Guangzhou beat Al Ahli of the United Arab Emirates 1-0 to win a second AFC Champions League title in three years.



Explore new worlds in every bite

Go on gourmet adventures with each course from our regionally inspired menus. From Indian dishes marinated in distinctive tikka spices to classics from Provence with thyme and seasonal vegetables. Savour global flavours that take you places.



Hello Tomorrow 

Over 150 destinations worldwide • Complimentary Chauffeur-drive service*

*Complimentary Chauffeur-drive service available for First Class and Business Class, excluding Trans-Tasman services and codeshare flights operated by Qantas to Southeast Asia. Mileage restrictions apply. For full terms and conditions, or more information visit emirates.com/au, call 1300 303 777, or contact your local travel agent.

.....
**“So I’m trying
to build up the
national team,
take it back to
where it was and
hopefully we can
go beyond what
the team I played
in accomplished.”**

KIATISUK SENAMUANG
.....

